Robert B. Franklin
ST. PAUL – JAN. 1967

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Roy Becker

The Complete Novels of

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

One Volume Edition

BLUE RIBBON BOOKS
NEW YORK

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WALTER J. BLACK, INC.

Printed in the United States of America by
THE CORNWALL PRESS, INC., CORNWALL, N. Y.

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VOLUME I

BEL-AMI

BEL-AMI

CHAPTER I

A LEAN POCKET

When the cashier had given him the ange out of his five-franc piece, eorge Duroy left the restaurant.

As he had a good carriage, by nature well as from his military training, drew himself up, twirled his mus- che, and threw upon the lingering cus- mers a rapid and sweeping glance— e of those glances which take in erything within their range like a cast t.

The women looked up at him in turn three little work-girls, a middle-aged usic mistress, disheveled, untidy, and aring a bonnet always dusty and a ss always awry, and two shopkeepers' ves dining with their husbands—all gular customers at this popular-price ablishment.

When he was on the sidewalk, he od still a moment, asking himself at he should do. It was the 28th of ne, and he had just three francs forty times in his pocket to carry him to end of the month. This meant the ion of two dinners without luncheon two luncheons without dinner. He ected that as the earlier repasts cost nty sous apiece and the latter thirty, would, if he were content with the cheons, be one franc twenty cen- es to the good, which would further resent two repasts of bread and sau- e and two "bocks" on the boulevard. This latter item was his greatest ex- travagance and his chief pleasure of a night; and he began to descend the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette.

He walked as in the days when he had worn a hussar uniform, his chest thrown out and his legs slightly apart, as if he had just left the saddle, pushing his way through the crowded street and shouldering people to avoid having to step aside. He wore his somewhat shabby hat slightly on one side, and brought his heels smartly down on the pavement. He seemed ever ready to defy somebody or something, the passersby, the houses, the whole city, retaining all the swagger of a dashing soldier reduced to the rank of a civilian.

Although wearing a sixty-franc suit, he was not devoid of a certain some- what loud though real air of fashion. Tall, well built, fair, with a curly mus- tache twisted up at the ends, bright blue eyes with small pupils, and reddish- brown hair curling naturally and parted in the middle, he bore a strong re- semblance to the dare-devil of popular romances.

When George Duroy reached the boulevard he paused again, undecided as to what he should do. He now thought of going on to the Champs Elysées and the Avenue du Bois Boulogne to seek a little fresh air under

the trees, but another wish tormented him, the desire for a love affair.

What shape should it take? He did not know, but he had been waiting it for three months, night and day. Occasionally, thanks to his good looks and gallant bearing, he gleaned a few crumbs of love here and there, but he was always hoping for something further and better.

He liked, however, the localities frequented by the lower class of women; he liked their balls, their cafés and their amusements. He liked to rub shoulders with them, speak to them, chaff them, feel himself near them. He did not despise them with the innate contempt of a well-born man.

He turned toward the Madeleine, following the stream of people which moved along, overcome by the heat. The larger cafés, filled with customers, were overflowing on to the pavement, and displayed their drinking public under the dazzling glare of their street lamps. Duroy had slackened his pace; an intense thirst parched his throat.

A hot thirst, a summer evening's thirst, had taken possession of him, and he imagined the delightful sensation of cool drinks flowing into his mouth. But if he drank only two bocks in the evening, farewell to the slender supper of the morrow, and he was only too well acquainted with periods of short commons at the end of the month.

He said to himself: "I must hold out till ten o'clock, and then I'll have my bock at the American Café. Confound it, how thirsty I am, though." And he glanced at the men seated at the tables drinking, all the people who could quench their thirst as they pleased. He went on, passing in front of the cafés with a sprightly, swaggering air, guessing at a glance from their dress and bearing how much money each customer ought to have about him. The sight of these men quietly sitting there filled him with wrath. If their pockets were searched, gold, silver and coppers would be found in them. On an average, each one must have at least two louis. There were certainly a hundred in the café; a hundred times two louis is four thousand francs. He murmured, "The swine," as he walked, swaggering, past them. If he could have got hold of one of them at a nice dark street corner he would have twisted his neck without scruple, as he did the country folk's fowls on field-days.

And he recalled his two years in Africa and the way in which he robbed the Arabs when stationed at little outposts in the South. A bright and cruel smile flitted across his lips at the recollection of an escapade which had cost the lives of three men of the Ouled-Alane tribe, and had furnished him and his comrades with a score of fowls, a couple of sheep, some gold, and food for laughter for six months.

The culprits had never been found, and, what is more, they had hardly been looked for, the Arab being looked upon somewhat as the natural prey of the soldier.

In Paris it was another thing. One could not plunder gracefully, sword by side and revolver in hand, far from civil authority and with impunity. He felt in his heart all the instincts of a non-commissioned officer let loose in a conquered country. He certainly regretted his two years in the desert. What a pity he had not stayed there! But, then, he had hoped for something better in re-

urning home. And now—ah! yes, now
ıe was getting it, was he not?

He clicked his tongue as if to verify
he parched state of his palate.

The crowd swept past him slowly,
ınd he kept thinking: "Set of hogs! All
hese idiots have money in their waist-
coat pockets." He pushed against peo-
ple and softly whistled a lively tune.
Gentlemen whom he thus elbowed
urned round grumbling. Women mur-
nured: "What a brute!"

He passed the Vaudeville Théâtre and
topped before the American Café, ask-
ng himself whether he should not drink
bock, so greatly did this thirst torture
im. Before making up his mind, he
glanced at the illuminated clock. It was
quarter past nine. He knew himself;
s soon as the glassful of beer was be-
ore him, he would gulp it down. What
would he do then up to eleven o'clock?

He passed on. "I will go as far as the
Madeleine," he said, "and walk back
lowly."

As he reached the corner of the Place
e l'Opéra, he passed a stout young fel-
ow, whose face he vaguely recollected
aving seen somewhere. He began to
ollow him, turning over his recollec-
ions and repeating to himself half
loud: "Where the deuce did I know
hat fellow?"

He searched without being able to
ecollect, and then all at once, by a
trange trick of memory, the same man
ppeared to him thinner, younger and
ad in a hussar uniform. He exclaimed
loud: "Why, Forestier!" and stepping
ut he tapped the other on the shoul-
er. The promenader turned round and
ooked at him and then said: "What is
, sir?"

Duroy broke into a laugh. "Don't you know me?" said he.

"No."

"George Duroy, of the Sixth Hussars."

Forestier held out his hands, exclaiming: "Why, old fellow! How are you?"

"Very well, and you?"

"Oh, not very brilliant. Just imagine, I have a chest made of papier mâché just now. I cough six months out of twelve, in consequence of a cold I caught at Bougival the year of my return to Paris, four years ago."

And Forestier, taking his old comrade's arm, spoke to him of illness, related the consultations, opinions, and advice of the doctors, and the difficulty of following this advice in his position. He was told to spend the winter in the South, but how could he? He was married, and was a journalist with a good position.

"I am political editor of the *Vie Française*. I write the proceedings in the Senate for the *Salut*, and from time to time literary criticisms for the *Planète*. So I have made my way."

Duroy looked at him with surprise. He was greatly changed, matured. He had now the manner, bearing and dress of a man in a good position and sure of himself, and the paunch of a man who lives well. Formerly he had been thin, slight, supple, heedless, brawling, noisy and always ready for a spree. In three years Paris had turned him into someone quite different, stout and serious, with some white hairs about his temples, though he was not more than twenty-seven.

Forestier asked: "Where are you going?"

Duroy answered: "Nowhere; I am just taking a stroll before turning in."

"Well, will you come with me to the *Vie Française,* where I have some proofs to correct, and then we will take a bock together?"

"All right."

They began to walk on, arm in arm, with that easy familiarity that exists between schoolmates and between men in the same regiment.

"What are you doing in Paris?" asked Forestier.

Duroy shrugged his shoulders. "Simply starving. As soon as I finished my term of service I came here—to make a fortune, or rather for the sake of living in Paris; and, for six months, I have been a clerk in the office of the Northern Railway at fifteen hundred francs a year, no more."

Forestier murmured: "Hang it, that's not much!"

"I should think not. But how can I get out of it? I am alone; I don't know any one; I can get no introductions. It is not good will that is lacking, but means."

His comrade looked him over from head to foot, like a practical man examining a subject, and then said, in a tone of conviction: "You see, my boy, everything depends upon assurance here. A clever fellow can more easily become a minister than an undersecretary. One must obtrude one's self on people; not ask things of them. But how the deuce is it that you could not get hold of anything better than a clerkship on the Northern Railway?"

Duroy replied: "I looked about everywhere, but could not find anything. But I have something in view just now; I have been offered a position as riding master at Pellerin's. There I shall get three thousand francs at the lowest."

Forestier stopped short. "Don't do that; it is stupid, when you ought to be earning ten thousand francs. You would nip your future in the bud. In your office, at any rate, you are hidden; no one knows you; you can get out of it, if you are strong enough, and make your own way. But once a riding master, and it is all over. It is as if you were head waiter at a place where all Paris goes to dine. When once you have given riding lessons to people in society or to their children, they will never be able to look upon you as an equal."

He remained silent for a few moments, evidently reflecting, and then asked:

"Have you a bachelor's degree?"

"No; I failed twice."

"That is no matter as long as you studied for it. If any one mentions Cicero or Tiberius, you know pretty well what they are talking about?"

"Yes; pretty well."

"Good; no one knows any more, with the exception of a score of idiots who have taken the trouble. It is not difficult to pass as being well-informed; the great thing is not to be caught in some blunder. You can manœuvre, avoid the difficulty, turn the tables and floor others by means of a dictionary. Men are all as stupid as geese and ignorant as donkeys."

He spoke with the quiet self-possession of one who knows life, and smiled as he watched the crowd go by. But all at once he began to cough, and stood still till the paroxysm was over, adding, in a tone of discouragement: "Isn't it terrible not to be able to get rid of this cough? And we are in the middle of

summer. Oh, this winter I shall go and get cured at Mentone. Health before everything."

They halted on the Boulevard Poissonnière before a large glass door, on the inner side of which an open newspaper was pasted. Three passersby had stopped and were reading it.

Above the door, in large letters of flame, outlined by gas jets, were the words *La Vie Française.*

Forestier pushed the door open, saying, "Come in." Duroy entered, ascended a handsome but dirty staircase visible from the street, passed through an anteroom where two messengers bowed to his companion, and reached a kind of waiting room, shabby and dusty, upholstered in dirty green Utrecht velvet, covered with spots and stains, and worn in places as if mice had gnawed it.

"Sit down," said Forestier. "I will be back in five minutes."

And he disappeared through one of the three doors opening into the room.

A strange, special, indescribable odor, the odor of a newspaper office, floated in the air of the room. Duroy remained motionless, slightly intimidated, above all, surprised. From time to time men passed hurriedly before him, coming in at one door and going out at another before he had time to look at them.

Others, too, arrived, serious, important-looking men, wearing tall hats with flat brims, as if this shape distinguished them from the rest of mankind.

Forestier reappeared holding the arm of a tall, thin fellow, between thirty and forty years of age, in evening dress, very dark, with his mustache ends twirled into sharp points, and with an insolent, self-satisfied bearing.

Forestier said to him: "Good-night, dear master!"

The other shook hands with him, saying: "Good-night, my dear fellow," and went downstairs whistling, with his cane under his arm.

Duroy asked: "Who is that?"

"Jacques Rival, you know; the celebrated news editor, the duelist. He has just been correcting his proofs. Garin, Montel and he are the three best news editors as regards intelligent setting forth of facts that we have in Paris. He gets thirty thousand francs a year here for two articles a week."

As they were leaving they met a short, stout man, with long hair and untidy appearance, who was puffing as he came up the stairs.

Forestier bowed low to him. "Norbert de Varenne," said he, "the poet; the author of *'Soleils Morts';* another who gets big pay. Every story he writes for us costs three hundred francs, and the longest do not run two hundred lines. But let us turn into the Neapolitan Café. I am beginning to choke with thirst."

As soon as they were seated at a table in the café, Forestier called for two bocks, and drank off his own at a single draught, while Duroy sipped his beer in slow mouthfuls, tasting and relishing it as if it were something rare and precious.

His companion was silent and seemed to be reflecting. Suddenly he exclaimed: "Why don't you try journalism?"

The other looked at him with surprise, and then said: "But, you know, I have never written anything."

"Bah; every one must begin. I could give you a job to hunt up information for me—to make calls and inquiries. You

would have two hundred and fifty francs a month to start with and your cab hire. Shall I speak to the manager about it?"

"Certainly!"

"Very well, then; come and dine with me to-morrow. I shall only have five or six people—the proprietor, Monsieur Walter and his wife; Jacques Rival, and Norbert de Varenne, whom you have just seen; and a lady, a friend of my wife. Is it settled?"

Duroy hesitated, blushing and perplexed. At length he murmured: "You see, I have no clothes."

Forestier was astounded. "You have no dress clothes? Hang it all, they are indispensable, though. In Paris one would be better off without a bed than without a dress suit."

Then, suddenly, feeling in his waistcoat pocket, he drew out some gold, took two louis, placed them in front of his old comrade, and said, in a cordial and familiar tone: "You will pay me back when you can. Hire the clothes you want or arrange to pay by installments, whichever you like, but come and dine with me to-morrow, half-past seven, number seventeen, Rue Fontaine."

Duroy, confused, picked up the money, stammering: "You are too good; I am very much obliged to you; you may be sure I shall not forget."

The other interrupted him: "All right. Another bock, eh? Waiter, two bocks."

Then, when they had drunk them, the journalist said: "Shall we stroll about a bit for an hour?"

"Certainly."

And they set out again in the direction of the Madeleine.

Duroy, rather perplexed, did not know what to say. At length he made up his mind. "I have never been in the Folies Bergère. I should not mind taking a look in there," he said.

"The Folies Bergère," exclaimed his companion; "the deuce, we shall roast there as in an oven. Well, all right, it is always amusing there."

And they turned their steps toward the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre.

The illuminated front of the establishment threw a bright light down the four streets which meet in front of it. A string of cabs were waiting for the close of the performance.

Forestier was walking in when Duroy stopped him.

"You are passing the box office," said he.

"I never pay," was the reply in a tone of importance.

When he approached the doormen they bowed and one of them held out his hand. The journalist asked: "Have you a good box?"

"Certainly, Monsieur Forestier."

He took the seat check held out to him, pushed the padded door with its leather borders, and they found themselves in the auditorium.

A cloud of tobacco smoke veiled like a faint mist the stage and the further side of the theatre.

The tall mirrors behind them reflected their backs and the faces of passers-by.

Forestier pushed his way through the groups, advancing quickly with the air of a man entitled to consideration.

He went up to an usher. "Box seventeen," said he.

"This way. sir."

And they were shut up in a little open box draped with red, and holding four chairs of the same color, so near to

one another that one could scarcely slip in between them. The two friends sat down. To the right as to the left, following a long curved line the two ends of which joined the proscenium, a row of similar cribs held people seated in like fashion, with only their heads and chests visible.

On the stage three young fellows in fleshings were executing feats in turn upon a trapeze.

Duroy scarcely noticed the performance, and with head averted, kept his eyes on the promenade behind him, full of men.

Said Forestier to him: "Look at the stalls; nothing but middle-class folks with their wives and children, good know-nothings who come here to see the show. In the boxes men about town, some artists, some second-rate girls; and, behind us, the strangest mixture in Paris. Who are these men? Watch them. There are some of every kind, of every profession and every caste, but blackguardism predominates. There are clerks of all kinds—bankers' clerks, government clerks, shopmen, reporters, pimps, officers in civilians' clothes, swells in evening dress, who have dined out, and who have dropped in here on their way from the Opéra to the Théâtre des Italiens; and then again, too, quite a crowd of suspicious folk who defy analysis. As to the women, only one type. We have known them for the last ten years; we see them every evening all the year round in the same places, except when they are making a sojourn at St. Lazare or at Lourcine."

Duroy no longer heard him. One of these women was leaning against their box and looking at him. She was a stout brunette, her skin whitened with paint, her black eyes lengthened at the corners with pencil and shaded by enormous and artificial eyebrows; and her painted lips, red as a fresh wound, gave her a bestial, ardent, unnatural appearance.

She motioned with her head to one of her friends who was passing, a blonde with red hair, and stout, like herself, and said to her, in a voice loud enough to be heard: "There is a pretty fellow!"

Forestier turned and tapped Duroy on the knee with a smile. "That is meant for you; you are a success, my dear fellow. I congratulate you."

The ex-officer blushed and mechanically fingered the two pieces of gold in his waistcoat pockets.

The curtain had dropped and the orchestra was now playing a waltz.

Duroy said: "Supposing we take a turn round the promenade."

"Just as you like."

They left their box and were at once swept away by the stream of promenaders. Pushed, pressed, squeezed, jostled, they went on, having before their eyes a crowd of hats. The girls, in pairs, passed amid this throng with facility, gliding between elbows and backs as if quite at home, perfectly at their ease, like fish in water, amid this masculine flood.

Duroy, charmed, let himself be swept along, drinking in with intoxication the air vitiated by tobacco and the odor of humanity. But Forestier sweated, puffed and coughed.

"Let us go into the garden," said he.

And, turning to the left, they entered a kind of covered garden, cooled by two large, ugly fountains. Men and women were drinking at zinc tables placed be-

neath evergreen trees growing in boxes.

"Another bock, eh?" said Forestier.

"Willingly."

They sat down and watched the passing throng.

But the stout brunette who just before had been leaning against the box occupied by the two comrades reappeared, walking proudly arm in arm with the stout blonde.

She smiled on perceiving Duroy, as though their eyes had already exchanged secrets, and, taking a chair, sat down quietly opposite him, and, making her friend sit down too, gave the order in a clear voice: "Waiter, two grenadines!"

Forestier, rather surprised, said: "You make yourself quite at home."

She replied: "It is your friend that captivates me. I believe that I could make a fool of myself for his sake."

Duroy, intimidated, could find nothing to say. He twisted his curly mustache, smiling in a silly fashion. The waiter brought the drinks, which the women drank off at a draught. They then arose, and the brunette, with a friendly nod of the head and a tap on the arm with her fan, said to Duroy: "You are not very talkative."

And they went off, swinging their trains.

Forestier laughed. "I say, old fellow, you are very successful with the women. You must see to it. It may be a help to you." He was silent for a moment and then continued in the dreamy tone of men who think aloud: "It is through them, too, that one gets on quickest."

And as Duroy still smiled without replying, he asked: "Are you going to stop any longer? I have had enough of it; I am going home."

The other murmured: "Yes, I shall stay a little longer. It is not too late."

Forestier rose. "Well, good-night, then. Till to-morrow. Don't forget. Seventeen, Rue Fontaine, at half-past seven."

"That is settled! Till to-morrow. Thanks."

They shook hands and Forestier walked away.

As soon as he had disappeared Duroy felt himself free.

He soon caught sight of the two women, the blonde and the brunette, who were still making their way through the throng of men.

He went straight up to them, and when he was quite close his courage failed him.

The brunette said: "Have you found your tongue again?"

He stammered, "By Jove!" without being able to say anything else.

The three stood together, checking the stream of promenaders, the current of which swept around them.

She asked: "Will you walk with me?"

As they went out he thought that he could easily hire a suit of dress clothes for the next evening.

CHAPTER II

AN IMPORTANT DINNER-PARTY

"Monsieur Forestier?"

"Third floor, the door on the left," the janitress had replied in an amiable tone which betokened consideration for her tenant, and George Duroy ascended the stairs.

He felt somewhat abashed, awkward and ill at ease. He was wearing a dress suit for the first time in his life, and was uneasy about the general effect of his toilet. He felt it was altogether defective, from his boots, which were not of patent leather, though neat, for he was naturally smart about his footgear, to his shirt, which he had bought that very morning for four francs fifty centimes at the Magasin du Louvre, and the limp front of which was already rumpled.

His trousers, rather too loose, set off his legs badly, seeming to flap about the calf with that creased appearance which second-hand clothes present. The coat alone did not look bad, being, by chance, almost a perfect fit.

He was slowly ascending the stairs with beating heart and anxious mind, tortured above all by the fear of appearing ridiculous, when suddenly he saw in front of him a gentleman in full dress looking at him. They were so close to one another that Duroy took a step back and then remained standing in amazement; it was himself, reflected in a tall mirror on the first floor landing. A thrill of pleasure shot through him to find himself so much more presentable than he had imagined.

Only having a small shaving-glass in his room, he had not been able to see his whole figure at once, and as he only had imperfect glimpses of the various items of his improvised toilet, he had mentally exaggerated his imperfections, and harped to himself on the idea of appearing grotesque.

But on suddenly coming upon his reflection in the mirror, he had not even recognized himself; he had taken himself for some one else, for a gentleman whom at the first glance he had thought very well dressed and fashionable looking. And now, looking at himself carefully, he recognized that really the general effect was satisfactory.

He studied himself as actors do when learning their parts. He smiled, held out his hand, made gestures, expressed sentiments of astonishment, pleasure and approbation, and essayed smiles and glances, with a view to displaying his gallantry toward the ladies, to let them see that he admired them and desired their acquaintance.

On reaching the second story he noticed another mirror, and slackened his pace to view himself in it as he went by. His bearing seemed to him really graceful. He walked well. And now he was filled with unbounded confidence in himself. Certainly he must be successful with such an appearance, the wish to succeed, and his native resolution and independence of mind. He wanted to run, to jump, as he ascended the last flight of stairs. He stopped in front of the third mirror, twirled his mustache as he had a trick of doing,

took off his hat to run his fingers through his hair and muttered half aloud, as he often did: "What a capital notion!" Then raising his hand to the bell-handle, he rang.

The door opened almost at once, and he found himself face to face with a man servant in plain clothes, serious, clean shaven and so perfect in his get-up that Duroy became uneasy again without understanding the reason of his vague emotion, due, perhaps, to an unwitting comparison of the cut of their respective garments. The man servant, who had patent leather shoes, asked, as he took the overcoat which Duroy had carried on his arm, to avoid exposing the stains on it: "Whom shall I announce?"

And he announced the name through a draped back portière leading into a drawing-room.

But Duroy, suddenly losing his assurance, felt himself breathless and paralyzed by fear. He was about to take his first step in the world he had looked forward to and longed for. He advanced nevertheless. A fair young woman, quite alone, was standing awaiting him in a large brilliantly lighted room full of plants, like a greenhouse.

He stopped short, quite disconcerted. Who was this lady who was smiling at him? Then he remembered that Forestier was married, and the thought that this pretty and elegant blonde must be his friend's wife put the finishing touch to his alarm.

He stammered: "Madame, I am——"

She held out her hand, saying: "I know, monsieur; Charles has told me of your meeting last evening, and I am very pleased that he had the happy thought of asking you to dine with us to-day."

He blushed up to his ears, not knowing what to say, and felt himself being inspected from head to foot, weighed and criticised.

He longed to excuse himself, to invent some pretext for explaining the deficiencies of his toilet, but he could not think of one, and did not dare touch on this difficult subject.

He sat down on an armchair she pointed out to him, and as he felt the soft, springy, velvet-covered seat yield beneath his weight, as he felt himself, as it were, supported and clasped by the padded back and arms, it seemed to him that he was entering upon a new and enchanting life, that he was taking possession of something delightful, that he was becoming somebody, that he was saved, and he looked at Madame Forestier, who had not taken her eyes off him.

She was dressed in pale blue cashmere, which set off the outline of her slender waist and full bust. Her arms and neck issued from a cloud of white lace, with which the bodice and short sleeves were trimmed, and her fair hair, dressed high, left a little fair fluffy cloud above the nape of her neck.

Duroy recovered his assurance beneath her glance, which reminded him, without his knowing why, of that of the girl he met at the Folies Bergère. She had gray eyes, of a bluish tinge, which imparted to them a strange expression; a thin nose, full lips, a rather full chin, and irregular but attractive features, full of archness and charm. It was one of those faces every trait of which reveals a special grace and seems to have its meaning—every movement to say or to hide something.

After a brief silence she asked:

"Have you been long in Paris?"

He replied slowly, recovering his self-possession: "A few months only, madame. I have a berth in one of the railway companies, but Forestier holds out the hope that I may, thanks to him, enter journalism."

She smiled more perceptibly and kindly and murmured, lowering her voice: "Yes, I know."

The bell had rung again. The servant announced "Madame de Marelle."

This was a little brunette, who entered briskly, and seemed to be outlined—moulded, as it were—from head to foot in a dark dress made quite plainly. A red rose fastened in her black hair caught the eye at once, and seemed to stamp her physiognomy, accentuate her distinctive character, and give the marked tone required.

A little girl in short frocks followed her.

Madame Forestier darted forward, exclaiming: "Good-evening, Clotilde."

They kissed one another, and then the child offered her forehead, with the assurance of a grown-up person, saying: "Good-evening, cousin."

Madame Forestier kissed her and then introduced them, saying: "Monsieur George Duroy, an old friend of Charles; Madame de Marelle, my friend and a kind of relative." She added: "You know we do not put on any airs here. You quite understand, don't you?"

The young man bowed.

The door opened again, and a short, stout gentleman appeared, having on his arm a tall, handsome woman, much younger than himself, and of distinguished appearance and grave bearing. They were Monsieur Walter, a Jew from the South of France, deputy, financier, capitalist and manager of the *Vie Française*, and his wife, the daughter of Monsieur Basile Ravalau, the banker.

Then came, one following the other, Jacques Rival, very elegant, and Norbert de Varenne, whose coat-collar was rather shiny from the friction of the long locks that fell down on his shoulders, scattering over them a few specks of dandruff. His badly tied cravat looked as if it had already done duty. He advanced with the airs and graces of an old beau, and, taking Madame Forestier's hand, he imprinted a kiss on her wrist. As he bent forward, his long hair spread like water over her bare arm.

Forestier entered in his turn, offering excuses for being late. He had been detained at the office of the paper by the Morel affair. Monsieur Morel, a Radical Deputy, had just addressed a question to the Ministry respecting a vote of credit for the colonization of Algeria.

The servant announced: "Dinner is served, madame," and they passed into the dining-room.

Duroy found himself seated between Madame de Marelle and her daughter. He again felt ill at ease, being afraid of making some mistake in the conventional handling of forks, spoons and glasses. There were four glasses, one of a pale bluish tint. What could one drink in that?

Nothing was said while the soup was being consumed, and then Norbert de Varenne asked: "Have you read the Gauthier case? What a funny business it is!"

And a discussion of this blackmailing case followed. They did not speak of it as the events recorded in newspapers

are spoken of in private families, but as a disease is discussed among doctors, or vegetables by market gardeners. They were neither shocked nor astonished at the facts, but sought out their hidden and secret motives with professional curiosity, and an utter indifference to the crime itself. The women, too, were interested in this investigation. And other recent events were discussed, commented upon, turned so as to show every side of them, and weighed correctly, with the practical glance and from the especial standpoint of dealers in news and vendors of the drama of life at so much a line, just as articles destined for sale are examined, turned over and weighed by tradesmen.

Then it was a question of a duel, and Jacques Rival spoke. That was his business, no one else could handle it.

Duroy dared not put in a word. He glanced from time to time at his neighbor, who captivated him. A diamond, suspended by a thread of gold, dangled from her ear like a drop of water that had rolled down it. From time to time she made an observation which always brought a smile to her hearer's lips. She had a quaint, neat, unexpected wit, the wit of an experienced woman of the world who views things with indifference and judges them with a superficial and benevolent skepticism.

Duroy sought in vain for some compliment to pay her, and not finding one, occupied himself with her daughter, filling her glass, holding the dishes for her as they were passed, and helping her. The child, more sedate than her mother, thanked him in a serious tone, with a little bow, saying: "You are very good, sir," and listened to her elders with a little thoughtful air.

The dinner was very good and every one was enraptured. Monsieur Walter ate like an ogre, hardly spoke, and glanced sideways under his glasses at the dishes offered to him. Norbert de Varenne kept him company, and from time to time let drops of gravy fall on his shirt front. Forestier, silent and curious, watched everything, exchanging glances of intelligence with his wife, like confederates engaged together on a difficult task which is going on swimmingly.

Duroy had found the wine to his liking, and let his glass be filled every time. A delicious cheerfulness stole over him, a warm cheerfulness, that mounted from the stomach to the head, flowed through his limbs, and penetrated him throughout. He felt himself permeated by a sense of absolute well-being of life and thought, of body and soul.

He longed to speak to bring himself into notice, to be listened to, appreciated like those men whose slightest words are enjoyed.

But the conversation, which had been going on uninterruptedly, linking ideas one to another, jumping from one topic to another at a chance word, a mere trifle, and skimming over a thousand matters, turned again on the great question put by Monsieur Morel in the Chamber representing the colonization of Algeria.

Monsieur Walter, between two courses, made a few jests, for his wit was skeptical and broad. Forestier told about his editorial for the following day. Jacques Rival demanded a military government with land grants to all officers after thirty years of colonial service.

"By this plan," he said, "you will

create an energetic class of colonists, who will have already learned to love and understand the country, and will be acquainted with its language and with all those grave local questions which are a stumbling block to all newcomers."

Norbert de Varenne interrupted him with "Yes, they will be acquainted with everything except agriculture. They will speak Arabic, but they will not know how to plant out beet-root and how to sow wheat. They will be even skillful at fencing, but very shaky as regards manures. On the contrary, this new land should be thrown absolutely open to every one. Intelligent men will achieve a position there, the others will go under. It is the social law."

A brief silence followed, and the listeners smiled.

George Duroy opened his mouth and said, feeling as much surprised at the sound of his own voice as if he had never heard himself speak: "What is chiefly lacking there is good land. The really fertile estates cost as much as they do in France, and are bought up as investments by rich Parisians. The real colonists, the poor fellows who leave home for lack of bread, are forced into the desert, where nothing will grow for want of water."

Every one looked at him, and he felt himself blushing.

Monsieur Walter asked: "Do you know Algeria, sir?"

George replied: "Yes, sir; I was there nearly two years and a half, and I was quartered in all three provinces."

Suddenly, unmindful of the Morel question, Norbert de Varenne interrogated him respecting a detail of manners and customs of which he had been informed by an officer. It was with respect to the Mzab, that strange little Arab republic sprung up in the midst of the Sahara, in the driest part of that burning region.

Duroy had twice visited the Mzab, and he narrated some of the customs of this singular country, where drops of water are valued as gold; where every inhabitant is bound to discharge all public duties, and where commercial honesty is carried further than among civilized nations.

He spoke with a certain raciness excited by the wine and by the wish to please, and told regimental anecdotes, incidents of Arab life and military adventure. He even hit on some telling phrases to depict these bare and yellow lands, eternally laid waste by the devouring fire of the sun.

All the women had their eyes turned upon him, and Madame Walter said, in her deliberate tones: "You could make a charming series of articles out of your recollections."

Walter looked at the young fellow over the top of his spectacles, as was his custom when he wanted to see any one's face distinctly. He looked at the dishes from beneath them.

Forestier seized the opportunity: "My dear sir, I had already spoken to you about Monsieur George Duroy, asking you to let me have him for my assistant in gleaning political tips. Since Marambot left us, I have no one to send in quest of urgent and confidential information, and the paper suffers in consequence."

Daddy Walter became serious, and pushed his spectacles up on to his forehead, in order to look Duroy well in the face. Then he said: "It is true that

Monsieur Duroy has evidently an original turn of thought. If he will come and have a chat with us to-morrow at three o'clock, we will settle the matter." Then, after a short silence, turning right round towards George, he added: "But write us a little series of entertaining articles on Algeria at once. Relate your experiences, and mix up the colonization question with them as you did just now. They are facts, genuine facts, and I am sure that they will greatly please our readers. But be quick. I must have the first article to-morrow or the day after, while the subject is being discussed in the Chamber, in order to catch the public."

Madame Walter added, with that serious grace which characterized everything she did, and which lent an air of kindness to her words: "And you have a charming title, 'Recollections of a Chasseur d'Afrique.' Is it not, Monsieur Norbert?"

The old poet, who had won renown late in life, feared and hated newcomers. He replied dryly: "Yes, excellent, provided that the keynote be followed, for that is the great difficulty; the exact key, what in music is called the pitch."

Madame Forestier cast on Duroy a smiling and protective glance, the glance of a connoisseur, which seemed to say: "Yes, you will get on." Madame de Marelle had turned toward him several times, and the diamond in her ear quivered incessantly as though the drop of water were about to fall.

The little girl remained quiet and serious, her head bent over her plate.

But the servant passed round the table, filling the blue glasses with Johannisberg, and Forestier proposed a toast, drinking with a bow to Monsieur Walter: "Prosperity to the *Vie Française.*"

Every one bowed toward the proprietor, who smiled, and Duroy, intoxicated with success, emptied his glass at a draught. He would have emptied a whole barrel after the same fashion; it seemed to him that he could have eaten a bullock or strangled a lion. He felt a superhuman strength in his limbs, unconquerable resolution and unbounded hope in his mind. He was now at home among these people. He had just taken his position, won his place. His glance rested on their faces with a new-born assurance, and he ventured for the first time to address his neighbor:

"You have the prettiest earrings I have ever seen, madame."

She turned toward him with a smile. "It was an idea of my own to have the diamonds hung like that, just at the end of a thread. They really look like dewdrops, do they not?"

He murmured, ashamed of his own daring, and afraid of making a fool of himself:

"It is charming; but the ear, too, helps to set it off."

She thanked him with a look, one of those woman's looks that go straight to the heart. And as he turned his head he again met Madame Forestier's eye, always kindly, but now, as he thought, sparkling with a livelier mirth, an archness, an encouragement. All the men were now talking at once, with gesticulations and raised voices. They were discussing the great project of the metropolitan railway. The subject was not exhausted till dessert was finished, every one having a deal to say about the slowness of the methods of

transit in Paris, the inconvenience of the tramway, the delays of omnibus travelling, and the rudeness of cabmen.

Then they left the dining-room to take coffee. Duroy, in jest, offered his arm to the little girl. She gravely thanked him, and raised herself on tiptoe in order to rest her hand on it.

On returning to the drawing-room he again experienced the sensation of entering a greenhouse. In each of the four corners of the room tall palms unfolded their shapely leaves, rising to the ceiling and there spreading downward.

On each side of the fireplace were India rubber plants like round columns, with the dark-green leaves spreading out one above the other; and on the piano two unknown shrubs, one covered with crimson flowers, the other all white, had the appearance of artificial plants, appearing too perfect to be real.

The air was cool and laden with a soft, vague perfume that could scarcely be defined. The young fellow, now more himself, considered the room attentively. It was not large; nothing attracted the eye except the shrubs, no striking bright color, but one felt at ease in it; one felt soothed and refreshed, and, as it were, caressed by one's surroundings.

"Do you take coffee, Monsieur Duroy?" And Madame Forestier held out a cup toward him with that smile which never left her lips.

"Thank you, madame."

He took the cup, and as he bent forward to take a lump of sugar from the sugar basin carried by the little girl, Madame Forestier said to him in a low voice: "Be attentive to Madame Walter."

Then she drew back before he could answer.

He first drank his coffee, which he was afraid of spilling on the carpet; then, his mind more at ease, he sought for some excuse to approach the wife of his new chief and begin a conversation. All at once he noticed that she was holding an empty cup in her hand, and as she was at some distance from a table, did not know where to put it. He darted forward with "Allow me, madame."

"Thank you, sir."

He took away the cup and then returned.

"If you knew, madame," he began, "the happy hours the *Vie Française* helped me to pass when I was away in the desert. It is really the only paper that is readable out of France, for it is more literary, wittier and less monotonous than the others. There is something of everything in it."

She smiled with amiable indifference and answered seriously:

"Monsieur Walter took a great deal of trouble to create this type of newspaper which supplies a need of the day."

And they began to chat. He had an easy flow of small talk, a charm in his voice and look and an irresistible seductiveness about his mustache. It curled coquettishly about his lips, reddish brown, with a paler tint at its curled tips.

They chatted about Paris, its suburbs, the banks of the Seine, watering places, summer amusements, all the current topics on which one can talk forever without wearying one's self.

Then as Monsieur Norbert de Varenne approached with a liqueur glass in his hand, Duroy discreetly withdrew.

Madame de Marelle, who had been speaking with Madame Forestier, summoned him.

"Well, monsieur," she said abruptly, "so you want to try your hand at journalism?"

He spoke vaguely of his projects, and then recommenced with her the conversation he had just had with Madame Walter; but as he understood his subject better he did it more justice, repeating as his own the things he had just heard. And he continually looked his companion in the eyes, as though to give a deep meaning to what he was saying.

She, in her turn, related anecdotes with the easy flow of spirits of a woman who knows she is witty and is always seeking to appear so, and becoming familiar she laid her hand from time to time on his arm, and lowered her voice to make trifling remarks which thus assumed a character of intimacy. He would have liked to have shown his devotion for her on the spot, to have defended her, shown her what he was worth, and his delay in his replies to her showed the preoccupation of his mind.

But suddenly, without any reason, Madame de Marelle called "Laurine!" and the little girl came.

"Sit down here, child; you will catch cold near the window."

Duroy was seized with a wild longing to kiss the child. It was as though some part of the kiss would reach the mother.

He asked in a gallant and at the same time fatherly tone: "Will you allow me to kiss you, mademoiselle?"

The child looked up at him in surprise.

"Answer, my dear," said Madame de Marelle, laughingly.

"Yes, sir, this time; but it will not do always."

Duroy, sitting down, lifted Laurine on to his knees and brushed the fine curly hair above her forehead with his lips.

Her mother was surprised. "What! she has not run away; it is astounding. Usually she will only let ladies kiss her. You are irresistible, Monsieur Duroy."

He blushed without answering and gently jogged the little girl on his knee.

Madame Forestier drew near and exclaimed with astonishment: "What! Laurine tamed! What a miracle!"

Jacques Rival also came up, cigar in mouth, and Duroy rose to take leave, afraid of spoiling, by some unlucky remark, the work done, his task of conquest begun.

He bowed, softly pressed the little outstretched hands of the women, and then heartily shook those of the men. He noted that the hand of Jacques Rival, warm and dry, answered cordially to his grip; that of Norbert de Varenne, damp and cold, slipped through his fingers; that of Daddy Walter, cold and flabby, was without expression or energy; and that of Forestier was plump and moist. His friend said to him in a low tone: "To-morrow at three o'clock; do not forget."

"Oh! no, do not fear."

When he found himself once more on the stairs, he felt a great longing to run down them, so great was his joy, and he darted forward, going down two steps at a time, but suddenly he caught sight of a large mirror on the second floor landing of a gentleman in

a hurry, and he stopped short, ashamed, as if he had been caught tripping.

Then he looked at himself in the glass for some time, astonished at being really such a handsome fellow, smiled complacently, and, taking leave of his reflection, bowed low to it as one bows to a personage of importance.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST STEP

When George Duroy found himself in the street, he hesitated as to what he should do. He wanted to run, to dream, to walk about thinking of the future as he breathed the soft night air, but the thought of the series of articles asked for by Mr. Walter haunted him, and he decided to go home at once and set to work.

He walked along quickly, reached the outer boulevard, and followed it as far as the Rue Boursault, where he dwelt. The house, six stories high, was inhabited by a score of small households of tradespeople and workmen, and he experienced a sickening sensation of disgust, longing to leave the place and live like well-to-do people in a clean dwelling, as he ascended the stairs, lighting his way with wax matches up the dirty steps, littered with bits of paper, cigarette ends and scraps of kitchen refuse.

The young fellow's room on the fifth floor looked into a kind of abyss, the huge cut of the Western Railway just above the exit of the tunnel by the Batignolles Station. Duroy opened his window and leaned against the rusty iron cross bar.

Beneath him, at the bottom of the dark hole, three motionless red lights resembled the eyes of huge wild animals, and further on a glimpse could be caught of others and of others again still further. Every moment whistles, prolonged or brief, pierced the silence of the night, some close at hand, others scarcely audible, coming from the direction of Asnières. Their modulations were akin to those of the human voice; one of them was approaching, with its plaintive appeal growing louder and louder every moment, and soon a big yellow light appeared, advancing with a loud noise, and Duroy watched the string of railway carriages swallowed up in the tunnel.

Then he said to himself: "Come, let's get to work."

He placed his light upon the table, but at the moment of commencing he found that he had only a quire of letter paper in the place. More's the pity, but he would make use of it by opening out each sheet to its full extent. He dipped his pen in ink and wrote at the head of the page, in his best hand, "Souvenirs d'un Chasseur d'Afrique."

Then he tried to frame the opening sentence. He remained with his head on his hands and his eyes fixed on the white sheet spread out before him. What should he say? He could no longer

recall anything of what he had been relating a little while back; not an anecdote, not a fact, nothing.

All at once the thought struck him: "I must begin with my departure."

And he wrote: "It was in 1874, about the middle of May, when France, exhausted, was resting after the catastrophes of the terrible year."

He stopped short, not knowing how to lead up to what should follow—his embarkation, his voyage, his first impressions.

After ten minutes' reflection, he resolved to put off the introduction till the morrow, and set to work at once to describe Algiers.

And he traced on his paper the words: "Algiers is a white city," without being able to state anything further. He recalled in his mind the pretty white city, tumbling as it were like a cascade of flat-roofed dwellings from the summit of its hills to the sea, but he could no longer find a word to express what he had seen or what he had felt.

After a violent effort, he added: "It is partly inhabited by Arabs."

Then he threw down his pen and rose from his chair.

On his little iron bedstead, hollowed in the center by the weight of his body, he saw his everyday garments lying worn and limp and ugly as the clothing at the Morgue. On a straw-bottomed chair his tall hat, his only one, brim uppermost, seemed to be awaiting an alms.

The wall paper, gray with blue bouquets, showed as many stains as flowers, old, suspicious-looking stains, the origin of which could not be defined; crushed insects or drops of oil, finger tips smeared with pomatum, or soapy water scattered while washing. It smacked of shabby genteel poverty, the poverty of a Paris lodging house. Anger rose within him at the wretchedness of his mode of living. He said to himself that he must get out of it at once; that he must finish with this irksome existence the very next day.

A frantic desire to work suddenly taking possession of him again, he sat down once more at the table and began anew to seek for phrases to describe the strange and charming physiognomy of Algiers, that anteroom of vast and mysterious Africa; the Africa of wandering Arabs and unknown tribes of negroes; that unexplored Africa whose improbable-looking animals, seemingly made to figure in fairy tales, are sometimes shown us in zoölogical gardens; ostriches, those exaggerated fowls; gazelles, those sacred goats; surprising and grotesque giraffes, grave-looking camels, monstrous hippopotami, shapeless rhinoceroses and gorillas, those frightful-looking brothers of mankind.

He vaguely felt ideas occurring to him; he might perhaps have uttered them, but he could not put them into writing. And his impotence exasperating him, he got up again, his hands damp with perspiration and his temples throbbing.

His eyes falling on his washing bill, brought up that evening by the concierge, he was suddenly seized with wild despair. All his joy vanished in a twinkling, with his confidence in himself and his faith in the future. It was all up; he could not do anything, he would never be anybody; he felt played out, incapable, good for nothing, damned.

And he went and leaned out of the window again, just as a train issued

from the tunnel with a loud and violent noise. It was going away far off, across the fields and plains toward the sea. And the recollection of his parents stirred in Duroy's breast. It would pass near them, that train, within a few leagues of their house. He saw it again, the little house at the entrance to the village of Canteleu, on the summit of the slope overlooking Rouen and the immense valley of the Seine.

His father and mother kept a little inn, a place where the tradesfolk of the suburbs of Rouen came out to lunch on Sunday and called "A la Belle Vue." They had wanted to make a gentleman of their son, and had sent him to college. Having finished his studies, and failing in his examination for the degree of B.A., he had entered the army with the intention of becoming an officer, a colonel, a general. But, disgusted with military life long before the completion of his five years' term of service, he had dreamed of making a fortune in Paris.

He came there at the expiration of his term of service, despite the entreaties of his father and mother, who, their visions having fled, wanted now to have him at home with them. In his turn, he hoped to achieve a future; he foresaw a triumph by means as yet vaguely defined in his mind, but which he felt sure he could scheme out and further.

His comrades used to say of him: "He is a sharp fellow, a schemer, he will look out for himself," and he had promised himself to act up to his character.

His inborn conscience of a Norman, hunted by the daily dealings of garrison life, rendered elastic by pillaging exploits in Africa, illicit commissions, shady tricks in business; spurred on, too, by the notions of honor current in the army, military bravado, patriotic sentiments, the fine-sounding tales current among non-commissioned officers, and the vain glory of the profession of arms, had become a kind of trick box in which something of everything was to be found.

But the wish to succeed reigned sovereign in it.

He had, without noticing it, begun to dream again, as he did every evening. He pictured to himself some splendid love adventure which should bring about all at once the realization of his hopes. He married the daughter of some banker or nobleman whom he met in the street and captivated at the first glance.

The shrill whistle of a locomotive, issuing from the tunnel like a big rabbit bolting out of its hole and tearing at full speed along the rails toward the round house, where it was to rest, awoke him from his dream.

Then, repossessed by the vague and joyful hope which ever haunted his mind, he wafted a kiss into the night, a kiss of love, addressed to the vision of the woman he was awaiting, a kiss of desire addressed to the fortune he coveted. Then he closed his window and began to undress, murmuring:

"I shall feel in a better mood for it to-morrow. My thoughts are not clear to-night. Perhaps, too, I have had just a little too much to drink. One can't work well under those circumstances."

He got into bed, blew out his light and went off to sleep almost immediately.

He awoke early, as one awakes on mornings of hope or of anxiety, and,

jumping out of bed, opened his window to drink a cup of fresh air, as he phrased it.

The houses of the Rue de Rome opposite, on the other side of the broad railway cut, glittering in the rays of the rising sun, seemed to be painted with white light. Afar off on the right a glimpse was caught of the slopes of Argenteuil, the hills of Sannois and the windmills of Orgemont, through a light bluish mist, like a floating and transparent veil cast across the horizon.

Duroy remained for some minutes gazing at the distant landscape, and he murmured: "It would be devilish nice out there a day like this." Then he bethought himself that he must set to work, and that at once, and also send his janitor's lad, at a cost of ten sous, to the office to say that he was ill.

He sat down at his table, dipped his pen in the ink, leaned his forehead on his hand, and sought for ideas. All in vain—nothing came.

He was not discouraged, however. He thought: "Bah, I am not accustomed to it. It is a trade to be learned like all other trades. I must have some help the first time. I will go and find Forestier, who will start my article going in ten minutes."

And he dressed himself.

When he got into the street he came to the conclusion that it was still too early to present himself at the residence of his friend, who must be a late sleeper. He therefore walked slowly along beneath the trees of the outer boulevard. It was not yet nine o'clock when he reached the Parc Monceau, fresh from its morning watering. Sitting down on a bench, he began to dream again. A well-dressed young man was walking up and down at a short distance, awaiting a woman, no doubt. Yes; she appeared, closely veiled and walking rapidly, and taking his arm, after a brief clasp of the hand, they walked off together. A riotous need of love broke out in Duroy's heart, a need of amours at once distinguished and delicate. He rose and resumed his journey, thinking of Forestier. What luck the fellow had! He reached the door at the moment his friend was coming out of it.

"You here at this time of day! What do you want of me?"

Duroy, taken aback at meeting him thus, just as he was starting out, stammered: "You see, you see, I can't manage to write my article; you know the article Monsieur Walter asked me to write on Algeria. It is not very surprising, considering that I have never written anything. Practice is needed for that as for everything else. I shall get used to it very quickly, I am sure, but I do not know how to set about beginning. I have plenty of ideas, but I cannot manage to express them."

He stopped, hesitatingly, and Forestier smiled somewhat slyly, saying: "I know how it is."

Duroy went on: "Yes, it must happen to every one when they first begin. Well, I came, I came to ask you for some help. In ten minutes you can give me a start, you can show me how to shape it. It will be giving me a good lesson in style, and really without you I do not see how I can manage it."

Forestier still smiled, and, tapping his old comrade on the arm, said: "Go in and see my wife; she will settle your business quite as well as I could. I have trained her to that kind of work. I myself have not time this morning or

I would willingly have done it for you."

Duroy, suddenly abashed, hesitated, feeling afraid.

"But I cannot call on her at this time of the day."

"Oh! yes, she is up. You will find her in my study arranging some notes for me."

Duroy refused to go upstairs, saying: "No. I can't think of such a thing."

Forestier took him by the shoulders, twisted him round on his heels, and, pushing him toward the staircase, said: "Go along, you great donkey, when I tell you to. You are not going to oblige me to go up these flights of stairs again to introduce you and explain the fix you are in."

Then Duroy made up his mind. "Thanks, then, I will go up," he said. "I shall tell her that you forced me, positively forced me to come and see her."

"All right. She won't scratch your eyes out. Above all, don't forget our appointment for three o'clock."

"Oh, never fear!"

Forestier hastened off and Duroy began to ascend the stairs slowly, step by step, thinking over what he would say and feeling uneasy as to his probable reception.

The man servant, wearing a blue apron and holding a broom in his hand, opened the door to him.

"Master is not at home," he said, without waiting to be spoken to.

Duroy persisted.

"Ask Madame Forestier," said he, "whether she will receive me, and tell her that I have come from her husband, whom I met in the street."

Then he waited while the man went away, returned and, opening a door on the right, said: "Madame will see you, sir."

She was seated in an office armchair in a small room, the walls of which were wholly hidden by books carefully ranged on shelves of black wood. The bindings, of various tints, red, yellow, green, violet and blue, gave some color and liveliness to these monotonous lines of volumes.

She turned round, still smiling. She was wrapped in a white dressing-gown, trimmed with lace, and as she held out her hand, displayed her bare arm in its wide sleeve.

"So soon?" she said and then added: "That is not meant for a reproach, but a simple question."

"Oh, madame, I did not wish to come up, but your husband, whom I met downstairs, obliged me to do so. I am so confused that I dare not tell you what brings me."

She pointed to a chair, saying: "Sit down and tell me about it."

She was twirling a pen quill between her fingers, and in front of her was a half-written page, interrupted by the young fellow's arrival. She seemed quite at home at this work table, as much at her ease as if in her drawing-room engaged in every-day duties. A faint perfume emanated from her dressing gown, the fresh perfume of a recent toilet. Duroy sought to divine, fancied he could trace, the outline of her plump, youthful figure through the soft material enveloping it.

She went on, as he did not reply: "Well, come, tell me what it is."

He murmured hesitatingly: "Well, you see—but I really dare not—I was working last night very late and quite early this morning on the article upon

Algeria, upon which Monsieur Walter asked me to write, and I could not get on with it—I tore up all my attempts. I am not accustomed to this kind of work, and I came to ask Forestier to help me this once——"

She interrupted him, laughing heartily. "And he told you to come and see me? That is a nice thing."

"Yes, madame. He said that you will get me out of my difficulty better than himself, but I did not dare, I did not wish to—you understand."

She rose, saying: "It will be delightful to work in collaboration with you like that. I am charmed at the notion. Come, sit down in my place, for they know my handwriting at the office. And we will soon turn out a good article."

He sat down, took a pen, spread a sheet of paper before him and waited.

Madame Forestier, standing by, watched him make these preparations, then took a cigarette from the mantelshelf and lit it.

"I cannot work without smoking," said she. "Come, what are you going to say?"

He lifted his head toward her with astonishment.

"But that is just what I don't know, since that is what I came to see you about."

She replied: "Oh! I will put it in order for you. I will make the sauce, but then I want the joint."

He remained embarrassed before her. At length he said hesitatingly: "I should like to relate my journey there from the beginning."

Then she sat down before him on the other side of the table, and looking him in the eyes:

"Well, tell it me first; for myself alone, you understand, slowly and without forgetting anything, and I will select what is to be used of it."

But as he did not know where to commence, she began to question him as a priest would have done in the confessional, putting precise questions which recalled to him forgotten details, people encountered and faces merely caught sight of.

When she had made him speak thus for about a quarter of an hour, she suddenly interrupted him with:

"Now we will begin. In the first place, we will imagine that you are narrating your impressions to a friend, which will allow you to write a lot of tomfoolery, to make remarks of all kinds, to be natural and funny if we can. Begin:

"My Dear Henry: You wish to know what Algeria is like, and you shall. I will send you, having nothing else to do in the little cabin of dried mud which serves me as a habitation, a kind of journal of my life, day by day and hour by hour. It will be a little spicy at times unfortunately, but you are not obliged to show it to your lady friends."

She paused to relight her cigarette, which had gone out, and the faint creaking of the quill on the paper stopped, too.

"Let us continue," said she.

"Algeria is a great French possession on the frontiers of the great unknown countries called the Desert, the Sahara, Central Africa, etc., etc.

"Algiers is the door, the pretty white door of this strange continent.

"But it is first necessary to get to

it, which is not a rosy task for every one. I am, you know, an excellent horseman, for I break in the colonel's horses; but a man may be a very good rider and a very bad sailor. That is my case.

"You remember Surgeon-Major Simbretas, whom we used to call Old Ipecacuanha, and how when we thought ourselves ripe for a twenty-four hours' stay in the infirmary, that blessed sojourning place, we would go to see him.

"How he used to sit on his chair, with his fat legs in his red trousers wide apart, his hands on his knees and his elbows stuck out, rolling his great eyes and gnawing his white mustache.

"You remember his favorite prescription:

" 'This man's stomach is out of order. Give him a dose of emetic number three, according to my formula, and then twelve hours off duty, and he will be all right.'

"It was a sovereign remedy, that emetic—sovereign and irresistible. One swallowed it because one had to. Then when one had undergone the effects of Old Ipecacuanha's prescription, one enjoyed twelve well-earned hours' rest.

"Well, my dear fellow, to reach Africa it is necessary to undergo for forty hours the effects of another kind of irresistible emetic, according to the prescription of the Compagnie Transatlantique."

She rubbed her hands, delighted with the idea.

She got up and walked about, after lighting another cigarette, and dictated as she puffed out little whiffs of smoke, which, issuing at first through a little orifice in the midst of her compressed lips, slowly spread and gradually disappeared, leaving in the air faint gray lines, a kind of transparent mist, like a spider's web. Sometimes with her open hand she would brush aside these light traces; at others she would cut them asunder with her forefinger and then watch with serious attention the two halves of the almost impenetrable vapor slowly disappear.

Duroy, with his eyes, followed all her gestures, her attitudes, the movements of her form and features, busied with this vague pastime which did not preoccupy her thoughts.

She now imagined the incidents of the journey, sketched travelling companions invented by herself, and a love affair.

Then, sitting down again, she questioned Duroy on the topography of Algeria, of which she was absolutely ignorant. In ten minutes she knew as much about it as he did, and she dictated a little chapter of political and colonial geography to coach the reader in such matters and prepare him to understand the serious questions which were to be brought forward in the following articles. She continued by a trip into the provinces of Orana, a fantastic trip, in which it was, above all, a question of women, Moorish, Jewish and Spanish.

"That is what interests most," she said.

She wound up by a sojourn at Saïda, at the foot of the great tablelands, and by a pretty little intrigue between the non-commissioned George Duroy and a Spanish work-girl employed at the *alfa* factory at Aïn el Hadjar. She described their rendezvous at night amid the bare, stony hills, with jackals, hyenas and Arab dogs yelling, barking, and howling among the rocks.

And she gleefully uttered the words, "To be continued." Then, rising, she added: "That is how one writes an article, my dear sir. Sign it, if you please."

He hesitated.

"But sign it, I tell you."

Then he began to laugh and wrote at the bottom of the page "George Duroy."

She went on smoking as she walked up and down, and he still kept looking at her, unable to find anything to say to thank her, happy to be with her, filled with gratitude and with the pleasure of this new-born intimacy. It seemed to him that everything around him was part of her, everything down to the walls covered with books. The chairs, the furniture, the air in which the perfume of tobacco was floating had about them something good, sweet and charming, which emanated from her.

Suddenly she asked: "What do you think of my friend, Madame de Marelle?"

He was surprised and answered: "I think—I think—her very charming."

"Is she not?"

"Yes, indeed."

He longed to add: "But not as charming as yourself," but dared not.

She resumed: "And if you only knew how funny, original and intelligent she is. She is a Bohemian—a true Bohemian. That is why her husband scarcely cares for her. He only sees her defects and does not appreciate her good qualities."

Duroy felt stupefied at learning that Madame de Marelle was married, and yet it was only natural she should be.

He said: "Oh! she is married, then. And what is her husband?"

Madame Forestier gently shrugged her shoulders and raised her eyebrows, with a gesture of incomprehensible meaning.

"Oh! he is an inspector on the Northern Railway. He spends eight days out of the month in Paris; what his wife calls 'obligatory duty,' or 'week of drudgery,' or 'holy week.' When you know her better, you will see how bright and charming she is. Go and call on her one of these days."

Duroy no longer thought of leaving. It seemed to him that he was going to remain here forever; that he was at home.

But the door opened noiselessly, and a tall gentleman entered without being announced. He stopped short on seeing a stranger. Madame Forestier seemed troubled for a moment; then she said in natural tones, though a slight rosy flush had risen to her cheeks:

"Come in, my dear sir. I must introduce one of Charles' old friends, Monsieur George Duroy, a future journalist." Then, in another tone, she added: "Our best and most intimate friend, the Comte de Vaudrec."

The two men bowed, looking each other in the eyes, and Duroy at once took his leave.

There was no attempt to detain him. He stammered a few thanks, grasped the outstretched hand of Madame Forestier, bowed again to the newcomer, who preserved the cold, grave air of a man of position, and went out quite disturbed, as if he had made a fool of himself.

On finding himself once more in the street he felt sad and uneasy, haunted by the vague idea of some hidden an-

noyance. He walked on, asking himself whence came this sudden melancholy. He could not tell, but the stern face of the Comte de Vaudrec, already somewhat aged, with gray hair, and the calmly insolent look of a very wealthy man, constantly recurred to his recollection. He noted that the arrival of this unknown, breaking off a charming *tête-à-tête,* had produced in him that chilly, despairing sensation that a word overheard, a trifle noticed, the least thing, suffices sometimes to bring about. It seemed to him, too, that this man, without his being able to guess why, was displeased at finding him there.

He had nothing more to do till three o'clock, and it was not yet noon. He had still six francs fifty centimes in his pocket, and he went and lunched at the Bouillon Duval. Then he prowled about the boulevard and as three o'clock struck ascended the advertisement stairway of the *Vie Française.*

The office boys were seated with folded arms on a bench, while, at an enclosed desk, an employee was sorting the mail that had just arrived. The entire get-up of the place, intended to impress visitors, was perfect. Every one had the appearance, bearing, dignity and smartness suitable to the anteroom of a large daily newspaper.

"Monsieur Walter, if you please?" inquired Duroy.

"The manager is engaged, sir," replied the doorkeeper. "Will you take a seat, sir?" and he indicated the waiting room, already full of people.

There were men grave, important-looking and wearing the ribbon of an order, and men with no linen apparent, whose frock coats, buttoned up to the chin, bore upon the breast stains recalling the outlines of continents and seas on geographical maps. There were three women among them. One of them was pretty, smiling and overdressed and had the air of a gay woman; her neighbor, with a wrinkled, tragic countenance, also stylishly dressed, but in a more severe fashion, had about her that something worn and artificial that old actresses generally have, a kind of false youth.

The third woman, in mourning, sat in a corner with the air of a grieving widow. Duroy thought that she had come to ask for charity.

However, no one was ushered into the room beyond, and more than twenty minutes had elapsed.

Duroy was seized with an idea, and, going back to the doorkeeper, said: "Monsieur Walter made an appointment for me to call on him here at three o'clock. At all events, see whether my friend Monsieur Forestier is here."

He was at once ushered along a lengthy passage which brought him to a large room, where four gentlemen were writing at a large table covered with green leather.

Forestier, standing before the fireplace, was smoking a cigarette. He turned his head as Duroy entered, saying: "Oh! here you are! Have you seen the governor?

"Come with me. I will take you in to see the governor. Otherwise you might be getting moldy here till seven in the evening."

They recrossed the waiting-room, in which the same people were waiting in the same order. As soon as Forestier appeared, the young woman and the old actress, rising quickly, came up to him. He took them aside, one after the

other, into the bay window, and, although they took care to talk in low tones, Duroy noticed that they were on familiar terms.

Then, having passed through two padded doors, they entered the manager's room. The business which had detained him for an hour or so was nothing more than a game of *écarté* with some of the gentlemen with flat-brimmed hats whom Duroy had noticed the night before.

Monsieur Walter dealt and played with concentrated attention and cautiously, while his adversary threw down, picked up and handled the light bits of colored pasteboard with the swiftness, skill and grace of a practical player. Norbert de Varenne, seated in the managerial armchair, was writing an article; Jacques Rival, stretched at full length on the couch, was smoking a cigar with his eyes closed.

The room smelt close with that blended odor of leather-covered furniture, stale tobacco and printing ink peculiar to editors' rooms and familiar to all journalists. Upon the black wood table, inlaid with brass, lay an incredible pile of papers, letters, cards, newspapers, magazines, bills and printed matter of every description.

Forestier shook hands with the watchers standing behind the card players, and without a word watched the progress of the game, then as soon as Daddy Walter had won he said: "Here is my friend Duroy."

The manager glanced sharply at the young fellow over the glasses of his spectacles and said:

"Have you brought my article? It would fit in very well to-day with the Morel debate."

Duroy took the sheets of paper folded in four from his pocket, saying: "Here it is, sir."

The manager seemed pleased and remarked with a smile: "Very good, very good. You are a man of your word. You must look through this for me, Forestier."

But Forestier hastened to reply: "It is not worth while, Monsieur Walter. I went over it with him to give him a lesson in the tricks of the trade. It is very well done."

And the manager, who was gathering up the cards dealt by a tall, thin gentleman, a deputy belonging to the Left Centre, remarked with indifference: "All right then."

Forestier, however, did not let him begin the new game, but, stooping, murmured in his ear: "You know you promised me to take on Duroy to replace Marambot. Shall I engage him on the same terms?"

"Yes, certainly."

Taking his friend's arm, the journalist led him away from the table, while Monsier Walter resumed the game.

Norbert de Varenne had not lifted his head; he did not appear to have seen or recognized Duroy. Jacques Rival, on the contrary, had shaken his hand with the marked and demonstrative energy of a good fellow who may be reckoned upon in case of any little difficulty.

They passed through the waiting room again, and as every one looked at them, Forestier said to the youngest of the women in a tone loud enough to be heard by the rest: "The manager will see you directly. He is just now engaged with two members of the Budget Committee."

Then he passed swiftly on, with a

hurried, business-like air, as though about to draft at once an article of the utmost importance.

As soon as they were back in the editor's room, Forestier said to Duroy: "Report here every day at three o'clock, and I will tell you the places you are to go to during the day, or evening, or the next morning. One—I will give you, first of all, a letter of introduction to the chief of police, who will put you in touch with one of his subordinates. You will arrange with him to obtain all the important news, official and quasi-official information, you know. In all matters of detail you will apply to Saint-Potin, who is up in the work. You can see him by and by or to-morrow. Above all, cultivate the knack of dragging information out of the men I send you to see and of obtaining an entrance everywhere, in spite of closed doors. You will receive for this a salary of two hundred francs a month, with two sous a line for the paragraphs you glean and two sous a line for all articles written by you, to order, on different subjects."

Duroy drank a glass of beer with his new comrades and then said to his friend: "What am I to do now?"

"I have nothing for you to-day. You can go if you want to."

"And our—our—article, will it go in to-night?"

"Yes, but do not bother yourself about it; I will correct the proofs. Write the continuation for to-morrow, and come here at three o'clock, the same as to-day."

After shaking hands with every one, Duroy went down the gorgeous staircase with a light heart.

CHAPTER IV

LESSONS IN JOURNALISM

Duroy slept badly, so excited was he by the wish to see his article in print. He was up as soon as it was daylight and was prowling about the streets long before the hour at which the porters from the newspaper offices run with their papers from kiosk to kiosk.

He went on to the Saint Lazare terminus, knowing that the *Vie Française* would be delivered there before it reached his own district. As he was still too early, he wandered up and down on the footpath.

He saw the newspaper vendor arrive, open her newsstand, and then saw a man bearing on his head a pile of papers. He rushed forward. There were the *Figaro*, the *Gil Blas*, the *Gaulois*, the *Evénement* and two or three morning journals, but the *Vie Française* was not among them. Fear seized him. Suppose the "Souvenirs d'un Chasseur d'Afrique" had been kept over for the next day, or that by chance they had not at the last moment seemed suitable to Daddy Walter!

Turning back to the kiosk, he saw that the paper was on sale without his

having seen it.

He darted forward, unfolded it after having thrown down three sous, and ran through the headings of the articles on the first page. Nothing. His heart began to beat, and he experienced strong emotion on reading at the foot of a column in large letters, "George Duroy." It was in; what happiness!

He began to walk along unconsciously, the paper in his hand and his hat on one side of his head, with a longing to stop the passers-by in order to say to them: "Buy this, buy this; there is an article by me in it." He would have liked to have bellowed with all the power of his lungs, like some vendor of papers at night on the boulevards, "Read the *Vie Française;* read George Duroy's article, 'Souvenirs d'un Chasseur d'Afrique.'"

And suddenly he felt a wish to read this article himself, to read it in a public place, a café, in sight of all. He looked about for some establishment already filled with customers. He had to walk in search of one for some time. He sat down at last outside a kind of wine shop, where several customers were already installed, and began to read his article, and several times said aloud: "Very good, very well put," to attract the attention of his neighbors and inspire them with the wish to know what there was in this sheet. Then, on going away, he left it on the table.

He thought: "What shall I do now?" And he decided to go to his office, take his month's salary and tender his resignation. He felt a thrill of anticipatory pleasure at the thought of the faces that would be pulled by the chief of his room and by his colleagues. The notion of the bewilderment of the chief above all charmed him.

He walked slowly, so as not to get there too early, the cashier's office not opening before ten o'clock.

His office was a large, gloomy room in which gas had to be kept burning almost all day long in winter. It looked into a narrow courtyard, with other offices on the farther side of it. There were eight clerks there, besides a sub-chief hidden behind a screen in one corner.

Duroy first went to get the hundred and eighteen francs twenty-five centimes enclosed in a yellow envelope and placed in the drawer of the pay clerk, and then, with a conquering air, entered the large room in which he had already spent so many days.

As soon as he came in the sub-chief, Monsieur Potel, called out to him: "Ah! it is you, Monsieur Duroy? The chief has already asked for you several times. You know that he will not allow any one to plead illness two days running without a doctor's certificate."

Duroy, who was standing in the middle of the room preparing his sensational effect, replied in a loud voice:

"As if I cared whether he does or not!"

There was a movement of amazement among the clerks, and Monsieur Potel's face appeared, filled with astonishment, above the screen which shut him up as in a box. At length the sub-chief said hesitatingly: "What did you say?"

"I said that it makes no difference to me. I have only called to-day to tender my resignation. I am engaged on the staff of the *Vie Française* at five hundred francs a month and extra pay for all I write. Indeed, I made my *début*

this morning."

The effect was overwhelming. No one stirred.

Duroy went on: "I will go and inform Monsieur Perthuis and then come and wish you good-by."

And he went in search of the chief, who exclaimed on seeing him: "Ah! here you are. You know that I won't have——"

His late employee cut him short: "It's not worth while roaring like that."

Monsieur Perthuis, a stout man, as red as a turkeycock, was choked with astonishment.

Duroy continued: "I have had enough of this crib. I made my *début* this morning in journalism, where I am assured of a very good position. I have the honor to bid you good-day."

And he went out. He was avenged.

As he promised, he went and shook hands with his old colleagues, who scarcely dared speak to him, for they had overheard his conversation with the chief, the door having remained open.

He found himself in the street again, with his salary in his pocket. He had a substantial breakfast at a good but cheap restaurant he was acquainted with, and having again purchased the *Vie Française* and left it on the table, went into several shops, where he bought some trifles, solely for the sake of ordering them to be sent home and giving his name—"George Duroy," with the addition, "I am the editor of the *Vie Française.*"

Then he gave the name of the street and the number, taking care to add: "Leave it with the janitor."

As he had still some time to spare, he went into the shop of a lithographer, who wrote visiting cards at a moment's notice, before the eyes of passers-by, and had a hundred, bearing his new occupation under his name, printed off while he waited.

Then he went to the office of the paper.

Forestier received him loftily, as one receives a subordinate. "Ah! here you are. Good. I have several things for you to attend to. Just wait ten minutes. I will finish what I am about."

And he went on with a letter he was writing.

At the other end of the large table a fat, bald, little man, with a very pale puffy face, and a white and shining head, was writing with his nose on the paper owing to extreme short-sightedness. Forestier said to him: "I say, Saint-Potin, when are you going to interview those people?"

"At four o'clock."

"Take young Duroy with you and show him the tricks of the trade."

Then turning to his friend, Forestier added: "Have you brought the continuation of the Algerian article? The opening this morning was very successful."

Duroy, taken aback, stammered: "No, I thought I should have time this afternoon. I had heaps of things to do. I was not able."

The other shrugged his shoulder with a dissatisfied air. "If you are not more exact than that you will spoil your future. Daddy Walter was reckoning on your copy. I will tell him it will be ready to-morrow. If you think you are to be paid for doing nothing, you are mistaken."

Then, after a short silence, he added: "The deuce! One must strike the iron while it is hot."

Saint-Potin rose, saying: "I am ready."

Then Forestier, leaning back in his chair, assumed a serious attitude in order to give his instructions, and turning to Duroy, said: "See here. Within the last two days the Chinese general, Li Theng Fao, has arrived at the Hôtel Continental, and the Rajah Taposahib Ramaderao Pali at the Hôtel Bristol. You will go and interview them." Turning to Saint-Potin, he continued: "Don't forget the main points I told you about. Ask the general and the rajah their opinion upon the action of England in the East, their ideas upon her system of colonization and domination and their hopes respecting the intervention of Europe and especially of France." He was silent for a moment, and then added in a theatrical aside: "It will be most interesting to our readers to learn at the same time what is thought in China and in India upon these matters which are of such intense interest at this moment." He continued for the benefit of Duroy: "Watch how Saint-Potin sets to work; he is a capital reporter, and try to learn the trick of pumping a man dry in five minutes."

As soon as they had crossed the threshold, Saint-Potin began to laugh and said to Duroy: "There's a bluffer for you. He even tried to bluff us. One would really think he took us for his readers."

They reached the boulevard, and the reporter observed: "Will you have a drink?"

"Certainly. It is awfully hot."

They turned into a café and ordered cooling drinks. Saint-Potin began to talk. He talked about the paper and every one connected with it with an abundance of astonishing details.

"The governor? A regular Jew.

"And yet a good fellow who believes in nothing, and does every one. His paper, which is Governmental, Catholic, Liberal, Republican, Orleanist, pay your money and take your choice, was only started to help him in his speculations on the Bourse and bolster up his other schemes. At that game he is very clever, and nets millions through companies without four sous of genuine capital.

"And he says things worthy of Balzac, the old shark. The other day I was in his room with that old tub, Norbert, and that Don Quixote, Rival, when Montelin, our business manager, came in with his morocco portfolio, that portfolio that every one in Paris knows, under his arm, Walter raised his head and asked, 'What news?' Montelin answered simply, 'I have just paid the sixteen thousand francs we owed the paper maker.' The governor gave a jump, an astonishing jump. 'What do you mean?' said he. 'I have just paid Monsieur Privas,' replied Montelin. 'But you are mad.' 'Why?' 'Why—why—why——' He took off his spectacles and wiped them. 'Why? Because we could have obtained a reduction of from four to five thousand francs.' Montelin replied, in astonishment: 'But, sir, all the accounts were correct, checked up by me and passed by yourself.' Then the governor, quite serious again, observed: 'What a fool you are! Don't you know, Monsieur Montelin, that one should always let one's debts mount up, in order to offer to compromise?' "

And Saint-Potin added, with a knowing shake of his head: "Eh! isn't that worthy of Balzac?"

Duroy had not read Balzac, but he replied: "By Jove, yes."

Then the reporter spoke of Madame Walter, an old goose; of Norbert de Varenne, an old failure; of Rival, a copy of Fervacques. Next he came to Forestier. "As to him, he has been lucky in marrying his wife, that is all."

Duroy asked: "What is his wife, really?"

Saint-Potin rubbed his hands. "Oh! a deep one, a smart woman. Comte de Vaudrec gave her a dowry and married her off."

Duroy suddenly felt a cold shiver run through him, a tingling of the nerves, a longing to smack this prattler on the face. But he merely interrupted him by saying:

"And your name is Saint-Potin?"

The other replied simply enough:

"No, my name is Thomas. It is in the office that they have nicknamed me Saint-Potin."

Duroy, as he paid for the drinks, observed: "But it seems to me that time is getting on, and that we have two noble foreigners to call on."

Saint-Potin began to laugh. "You are still green. So you fancy that I am going to ask that Chinaman and that Hindoo what they think of England? As if I did not know better than themselves what they ought to think in order to please the readers of the *Vie Française*. I have already interviewed five hundred of these Chinese, Persians, Hindoos, Chilians, Japanese and others. They all reply the same, according to me. I have only to take my article in the last comer and copy it word for word. What has to be changed, though, is their appearance, their names, their titles, their age and their suite. Oh! on that point it does not do to make a mistake, for I should be snapped up sharp by the *Figaro* or the *Gaulois*. But on these matters the hall porters at the Hôtel Bristol and the Hôtel Continental will put me right in five minutes. We will smoke a cigar as we walk there. Five francs cab hire to charge to the paper. That is how one sets about it, my dear fellow, when one is practical."

"It must be worth something to be a reporter under these circumstances," said Duroy.

The journalist replied mysteriously: "Yes, but nothing pays so well as paragraphs, on account of the veiled advertisements."

They had got up and were passing down the boulevard toward the Madeleine. Saint-Potin suddenly observed to his companion: "You know if you have anything else to do, I shall not need you in any way."

Duroy shook hands and left him. The notion of the article to be written that evening worried him, and he began to think.

Having dined at a wine shop near the Arc de Triomphe, he walked slowly home along the outer boulevards and sat down at his table to work. But as soon as he had the sheet of blank paper before his eyes, all the materials that he had accumulated fled from his mind as though his brain had evaporated.

After an hour of effort and five sheets of paper disfigured by opening phrases that had no continuation, he said to himself: "I am not yet broken in to the business. I must have another lesson." And all at once the prospect of another morning's work with Madame Forestier filled him with anticipation.

It was past ten when he rang his friend's bell.

The man servant replied: "Master is busy at work."

Duroy had not thought that the husband might be at home. He insisted, however, saying: "Tell him that I have called on a matter requiring immediate attention."

After waiting five minutes, he was shown into the study in which he had passed such a pleasant morning. In the chair he had occupied Forestier was now seated writing, while his wife in the same white gown leaned against the mantelpiece and dictated, cigarette in mouth.

Duroy, halting on the threshold, murmured: "I really beg your pardon; I am afraid I am disturbing you."

His friend, turning his head toward him—an angry face, too—growled: "What is it you want now? Be quick; we are pressed for time."

The intruder, taken aback, stammered: "It is nothing; I beg your pardon."

But Forestier, growing angry, exclaimed: "Come, hang it all, don't waste time about it; you have not forced your way in just for the sake of wishing us good-morning, I suppose?"

Then Duroy, greatly perturbed, made up his mind.

"No—you see—the fact is—I can't quite manage my article—and you were —so—so kind last time—that I hoped —that I ventured to come——"

Forestier cut him short. "You have plenty of assurance. So you think I am to do your work, and that all you have to do is call on the cashier at the end of the month to draw your screw? No; that is too good."

The young woman went on smoking without saying a word, and with a vague smile, which seemed like an amiable mask, concealing the irony of her thoughts.

Duroy, coloring up, stammered: "Excuse me—I thought——" Then suddenly, and in a clear voice, he went on: "I beg your pardon a thousand times, madame, while again thanking you most sincerely for the charming article you produced for me yesterday." He bowed, remarked to Charles, "I shall be at the office at three," and went out.

He walked home rapidly, grumbling: "Well, I will do it all alone, and they shall see——"

Scarcely had he got in than, excited by anger, he began to write. He continued the adventure begun by Madame Forestier, heaping up details of catch-penny romance, surprising incidents and inflated descriptions with the style of a schoolboy and the phraseology of the barrack-room. Within an hour he had finished an article which was a chaos of nonsense and took it with every assurance to the *Vie Française*.

The first person he met was Saint-Potin, who, grasping his hand with the energy of an accomplice, said: "You have read my interview with the Chinese and the Hindoo? Isn't it funny? It has amused every one. And I did not even get a glimpse of them."

Duroy, who had not read anything, at once took up the paper and ran his eye over a long article, headed: "India and China," while the reporter pointed out the most interesting passages.

Forestier came in hurriedly, saying: "Good; I want both of you." And he mentioned a number of political items

that would have to be obtained that very afternoon. Duroy held out his article. "Here is the continuation about Algeria."

"Very good. Hand it over and I will give it to the governor."

That was all.

Saint-Potin led away his new colleague, and when they were in the passage, he said to him: "Have you seen the cashier?"

"No; why?"

"Why? To draw your money. You see, you should always draw a month in advance. One never knows what may happen."

"Why—I ask for nothing better."

"I will introduce you to the cashier. He will make no difficulty about it. They pay well here."

Duroy went and drew his two hundred francs, with twenty-eight more for his article of the day before, which, added to what remained of his salary from the railway company, gave him three hundred and forty francs in his pocket. He had never owned such a sum, and thought himself possessed of wealth for an indefinite period.

When evening had come, Duroy, who had nothing more to do, thought of going again to the Folies-Bergère, and putting a bold face on it, went up to the box office.

"I am George Duroy, on the staff of the *Vie Française*. I came here the other day with Monsieur Forestier, who promised to see about my being given a pass. I do not know whether he has thought of it."

The list was referred to. His name was not entered. However, the box-office keeper, a very affable man, at once said: "You can go in all the same, sir, and write to the manager, who, I am sure, will attend to it."

He went in and almost immediately met Rachel, the woman he had met the first evening. She came up to him, saying: "Good-evening, ducky. Are you quite well?"

"Very well, thanks; and you?"

"I am all right. Do you know I have dreamed of you twice since last time."

And, lifting her eyes toward the young man's mustache, she took his arm and leaned lovingly upon it.

"Let us go and have a grenadine first of all," she remarked. "And then we will take a stroll together. I should like to go to the Opéra like this, with you, to show you off."

It was broad day when he arose the next morning, and the notion occurred to him to buy the *Vie Française*. He opened the paper with feverish hand. His article was not there, and he stood on the footpath, anxiously running his eye down the printed columns with the hope of at length finding what he was in search of. A weight suddenly oppressed his heart.

Entering the office some hours later, he went to see Monsieur Walter.

"I was surprised at not seeing my second article on Algeria in the paper this morning, sir," said he.

The manager raised his head and replied in a dry tone: "I gave it to your friend Forestier and asked him to read it through. He did not think it up to the mark; you must rewrite it."

Duroy, in a rage, went out without saying a word, and abruptly entering his old comrade's room, said: "Why didn't you let my article go in this morning?"

"The governor thought it poor, and

told me to give it back to you to do over again. There it is." And he pointed to the copy, unfolded, beneath a paper weight.

Duroy, abashed, could find nothing to say in reply, and as he was putting his prose into his pocket, Forestier went on: "To-day you must first of all go to the police department." And he proceeded to give a list of business errands and items of news to be attended to.

Duroy went off without being able to think of the cutting remark he wished to utter. He brought back his article the next day. It was returned to him again.

Having rewritten it a third time and finding it still refused, he understood that he was trying to go ahead too fast, and that Forestier's hand alone could help him on his way. He did not, therefore, say anything more about the "Souvenirs d'un Chasseur d'Afrique," but resolved to be adaptable and crafty, since it was necessary, and, while awaiting something better, to zealously discharge his duties as a reporter.

He became familiar with the secrets of theatrical and political life, with the waiting-rooms of statesmen and the lobby of the Chamber of Deputies; the important countenances of Cabinet officials, and the grim looks of sleepy doorkeepers. He was in continual communication with ministers, janitors, generals, police agents, princes, pimps, courtesans, ambassadors, bishops, priests, adventurers, men of fashion, card-sharpers, cab-drivers, waiters and many others, having become the interested yet indifferent friend of all these; confounding them together in his estimation, measuring them with the same measure, judging them with the same eye, through having to see them every day and at any hour, without any change of ideas, and to converse with them all on the same matter, bearing on his own business. He compared himself to a man who had to drink of samples of every kind of wine one after the other, and who would soon be unable to tell Château Margaux from Argenteuil.

He soon became a remarkable reporter. However, as he only got ten centimes a line in addition to his salary of two hundred francs a month, and as life on the boulevards and in cafés and restaurants is costly, he never had a penny, and was disgusted with his poverty. There must be some trick, he thought, as he saw some of his colleagues with their pockets full of money without ever being able to understand what secret methods they employed to procure this abundance. He enviously suspected unknown and suspicious transactions, services rendered, a whole system of graft carried on and tolerated. He would have to solve the mystery, enter into a tacit partnership, obtrude himself on the comrades who were dividing the spoils without him.

And of an evening, as he watched the trains go by from his window, he would think over the best method to attain this end.

CHAPTER V

THE FIRST AFFAIR

Two months had gone by, September was at hand, and the rapid fortune which Duroy had hoped for seemed to him slow in coming. He was, above all, distressed at the social mediocrity of his position, and did not see by what path he could scale the heights on which one finds respect, power and money. He felt shut up in the middle-class calling of a reporter, so walled in as to be unable to get out of it. He was appreciated, but only in accordance with his position. Even Forestier, to whom he rendered a thousand services, no longer invited him to dinner, and treated him in every way as an inferior, though still accosting him as a friend.

From time to time, it is true, Duroy, seizing an opportunity, got in a short article, and having acquired through his news items a mastery over his pen, and a tact which he lacked when he wrote his second article on Algeria, no longer ran any risk of having his descriptions of facts refused. But between this and drawing on his imagination for a story, or writing authoritatively on political questions, there was as great a difference as between driving in the Bois de Boulogne as the coachman or as the owner of the carriage. That which humiliated him above everything was to see the doors of society closed to him, not to meet people on equal terms, to be unable to have close friendships with those of the opposite sex, although several well-known actresses had occasionally received him with an interested familiarity.

He had often thought of calling on Madame Forestier, but the recollection of their last meeting checked and humiliated him; and, besides, he was awaiting an invitation to do so from her husband. Then the recollection of Madame de Marelle occurred to him, and recalling that she had asked him to come and see her, he called one afternoon when he had nothing to do.

"I am always at home till three o'clock," she had said.

He rang at the bell of her residence, a fourth floor in the Rue de Verneuil, at half-past two.

At the sound of the bell a servant opened the door, an untidy girl, who tied her cap-strings as she replied: "Yes, madame is at home, but I don't know whether she is up."

And she pushed open the drawing-room door, which was ajar. Duroy went in. The room was fairly large, scantily furnished and neglected-looking.

Duroy sat down immediately. He waited a long time. Then the door opened and Madame de Marelle came running in, wearing a Japanese morning gown of rose-colored silk, embroidered with golden landscapes, blue flowers and white birds.

"How good of you to come and see me!" she exclaimed. "I had made up my mind that you had forgotten me."

She held out both her hands with a delighted air, and Duroy, whom the commonplace appearance of the room had put at his ease, kissed one of them, as he had seen Norbert de Varenne do.

She begged him to sit down, and then, looking him over from head to foot, said: "How you have changed! You have improved in looks. Paris has done you good. Come, tell me the news."

And they began to gossip at once, as if they had been old acquaintances.

Suddenly Madame de Marelle exclaimed in astonishment: "It is strange how I get on with you. It seems to me as though I had known you for ten years. We shall become good friends, no doubt. Are you willing?"

He answered: "Certainly," with a smile which said still more.

She went on talking, each phrase sparkling with that ready wit of which she had acquired the habit, just as a workman acquires the knack needed to accomplish a task that seems difficult to others. He listened, thinking: "All this is worth remembering. A man could write charming articles of Paris gossip by getting her to chat over the events of the day."

Some one tapped softly, very softly, at the door by which she had entered, and she called out: "You can come in, pet."

Her little girl made her appearance, walked straight up to Duroy and held out her hand to him. The astonished mother murmured: "But this is a complete conquest. I no longer recognize her."

The young fellow, having kissed the child, made her sit down beside him, and with a serious manner asked her pleasant questions as to what she had been doing since they last met. She replied in her little flute-like voice, with her grave and grown-up air.

The clock struck three and the journalist rose.

"Come often," said Madame de Marelle, "and we will chat as we have done to-day; it will always give me pleasure. But how is it one no longer sees you at the Forestiers'?"

He replied: "Oh! for no special reason. I have been very busy. I hope to meet you there again one of these days."

He went out, his heart full of hope, though without knowing why.

He did not speak to Forestier of this visit. But he retained a recollection of it the following days, and more than the recollection.

He paid a second visit a few days later.

The maid ushered him into the drawing-room and Laurine at once appeared. She no longer held out her hand, but her forehead, and said: "Mamma told me to request you to wait for her. She will be a quarter of an hour, because she is not dressed yet. I will keep you company."

Duroy, who was amused by the ceremonious manners of the little girl, replied: "Certainly, mademoiselle. I shall be delighted to pass a quarter of an hour with you, but I warn you that for my part I am not at all serious, and that I play all day long, so I suggest a game of tag."

The girl was astounded; then she smiled as a woman would have done at this idea, which shocked her a little as well as astonished her, and murmured: "Rooms are not meant to play in."

He said: "It is all the same to me. I play everywhere. Come, catch me."

And he began to run round the table, enticing her to come after him, which she did, smiling with a species of polite condescension. Suddenly, just as

she thought she had him, he seized her in his arms, and lifting her to the ceiling, exclaimed: "Tag."

The delighted child wriggled her legs to escape and laughed with all her heart.

Madame de Marelle came in at that moment and was amazed. "What, Laurine, Laurine playing! You are a sorcerer, sir."

He put down the little girl, kissed her mother's hand, and they sat down with the child between them. They began to chat, but Laurine, usually so silent, kept talking all the while and had to be sent to her room. She obeyed without a word, but with tears in her eyes.

As soon as they were alone Madame de Marelle lowered her voice. "You do not know, but I have a grand scheme, and I have thought of you. This is it. As I dine every week at the Forestiers', I return their hospitality from time to time at some restaurant. I do not like to entertain company at home; my household is not arranged for that, and, besides, I do not understand anything about domestic affairs. I like to live as I please. So I entertain them now and then at a restaurant, but it is not very lively when there are only we three, and my own acquaintances scarcely assimilate with them. I tell you all this in order to explain a somewhat irregular invitation. You understand, do you not, that I want you to make one of us on Saturday at the Café Riche at half-past seven. You know the place?"

He accepted with pleasure, and she went on: "There will be only four of us."

He left her, retaining, as before, the sense of her continued presence as in a species of hallucination. And he awaited the day of the dinner with growing impatience.

Having hired, the second time, an evening suit—his funds not yet allowing him to buy one—he arrived first at the rendezvous, a few minutes before the time. He was ushered up to the second story and into a small private dining-room hung with red and white, its single window opening on to the boulevard. A square table, laid for four, displayed a white cloth, so shining that it seemed to be varnished, and glasses and silver that glittered brightly in the light of the twelve candles of two tall candelabra. He heard throughout the huge house a confused murmur, the murmur of a large restaurant, the clattering of glass and silver, the hurried steps of the waiters, deadened by the carpets in the passages, and the opening of doors, letting out the sound of voices from the numerous private rooms in which people were dining. Forestier came in and shook hands with him with a cordial familiarity which he never displayed at the office of the *Vie Française*.

"The ladies are coming together," said he; "these little dinners are very pleasant."

Then he glanced at the table, turned off a gas jet that was turned low, closed one sash of the window on account of the draught, and chose a sheltered place for himself, with the remark: "I must be careful; I have been better for a month, and now I feel worse again these last few days. I must have caught cold on Tuesday coming out of the theatre."

The door was opened, and, followed by a waiter, the two ladies appeared.

As Duroy bowed to Madame Forestier she scolded him for not having

come to see her again. Then she added, with a smile in the direction of her friend: "I know what it is; you prefer Madame de Marelle; you can find time to visit her."

They sat down to table, and the waiter having handed the wine card to Forestier, Madame de Marelle exclaimed: "Give these gentlemen whatever they like, but for us iced champagne, the best, sweet champagne."

The Ostend oysters were brought in, tiny and plump, like little ears enclosed in shells, and melting between the tongue and the palate like salted bonbons. Then, after the soup, a trout was served, as rose-tinted as a young girl, and the guests began to talk.

They spoke at first of a current scandal and then they began to talk of love. Without admitting it to be eternal, Duroy understood it as enduring, creating a bond, a tender friendship, a confidence. The union of the senses was only a seal to the union of hearts. But he was angry at the outrageous jealousies, melodramatic scenes and unpleasantnesses which almost always accompany ruptures.

When he ceased speaking, Madame de Marelle replied: "Yes, it is the only good thing in life, and we often spoil it by preposterous unreasonableness."

Madame Forestier, who was toying with her knife, added: "Yes—yes—it is pleasant to be loved."

And she seemed to be carrying her dream farther, to be thinking things that she dared not give words to.

As the first entrée was slow in coming, they sipped from time to time a mouthful of champagne and nibbled bits of crust. And the thought of love slowly intoxicated their souls, as the bright wine, rolling drop by drop down their throats, fired their blood and perturbed their minds.

The waiter brought in some lamb cutlets, delicate and tender, upon a thick layer of asparagus tips.

"Ah! this is good," exclaimed Forestier; and they ate slowly, enjoying the delicate meal and the vegetables as smooth as cream.

Duroy resumed: "For my part, when I love a woman, everything else in the world disappears." He said this in a tone of conviction.

Madame Forestier murmured in her indifferent tone: "There is no happiness comparable to that of the first hand-clasp, when the one asks: 'Do you love me?' and the other replies, 'Yes.'"

Madame de Marelle, who had just tossed off a fresh glass of champagne, said gayly, as she put down her glass: "For my part, I am not so platonic."

And all began to smile with kindling eyes at these words.

Forestier, stretched out in his seat on the divan, rested his arms on the cushions, and said, in a serious tone: "This frankness does you honor, and proves that you are a practical woman."

And the conversation, descending from high-flown theories concerning love, strayed into the flowery garden of polite smut. The roast, consisting of partridges flanked by quails, had been served; then came green peas and then a dish of *foies gras,* accompanied by a curly lettuce salad. They had partaken of all these things without distinguishing their taste, without noticing it, solely preoccupied with their subject.

Dessert came and then coffee, and the liqueurs produced a still greater warmth and agitation in their

excited imaginations.

Cigarettes were lighted, and, all at once, Forestier began to cough. It was a terrible fit, that seemed to tear his chest, and with red face and forehead damp with perspiration, he choked behind his napkin. When the fit was over he growled angrily: "These feeds are very bad for me; they are stupid." All his good humor had vanished at the apprehension of illness that haunted his thoughts. "Let us go home," said he.

Madame de Marelle rang for the waiter and asked for the bill. It was brought almost immediately. She tried to read it, but the figures danced before her eyes, and she passed it to Duroy, saying: "Here, pay for me; I can't see straight."

And at the same time she threw him her purse. The bill amounted to a hundred and thirty francs. Duroy checked it and then handed over two notes and received back the change, saying in a low tone: "What shall I give the waiter?"

"What you like; I do not know."

He put five francs on the salver and handed back the purse, saying: "Shall I see you to your door?"

"Certainly. I am incapable of finding my way alone."

They shook hands with the Forestiers, and Duroy called a cab. He felt through his sleeve the warmth of her shoulder, and he could find nothing to say to her, absolutely nothing, his mind being paralyzed by the imperative desire to seize her in his arms.

She did not speak either, but remained motionless in her corner. He would have thought that she was asleep if he had not seen her eyes gleam every time a ray of light entered the carriage.

"What was she thinking?" He felt that he must not speak, that a word, a single word, breaking this silence would destroy his chances.

But the cab having shortly stopped before the house in which she resided, Duroy had no time to seek passionate phrases to thank her and express his admiration. She did not stir. Duroy got out first to help her to alight.

At length she got out of the cab, and, without saying a word, he rang the bell, and as the door opened, said trembling: "When shall I see you again?"

She murmured so softly that he scarcely heard it: "Come and lunch with me to-morrow." And she disappeared in the entry, pushing to the heavy door, which closed with a noise like a cannon. He gave the driver five francs and began to walk along with rapid and triumphant steps and heart overflowing with joy.

He was somewhat agitated the next day as he ascended Madame de Marelle's staircase. How would she receive him? And supposing she should not receive him at all?

The little servant opened the door. She looked the same as usual. He felt reassured, as though he had expected the servant to look disturbed. He asked: "Is your mistress quite well?"

She replied: "Oh, yes, sir; the same as ever," and showed him into the drawing-room.

He went straight to the mirror to ascertain the state of his hair and his toilet, and was arranging his necktie before it, when he saw in it the young woman watching him as she stood at the door leading from her room. He pretended not to have noticed her, and the pair looked at one another for a few

moments in the glass, observing and watching before finding themselves face to face. He turned round. She had not moved and seemed to be waiting. He darted forward, stammering: "My dear! my dear!"

She held out her arms and fell upon his breast; then, having raised her head toward him, their lips met.

"It is easier than I should have imagined," he thought. "It is all going on very well."

He smiled without saying a word, while striving to throw a world of love into his looks. She, too, smiled with that smile with which women show their consent, and murmured: "We are alone. I have sent Laurine to lunch with one of her young friends."

"Thank you," he said. "I will worship you."

They sat down side by side on the sofa. He wanted to start a clever and attractive chat, but not being able to do so to his liking, stammered: "Then you are not too angry with me?"

She put her hand on his mouth, saying: "Be quiet."

They sat in silence, looking into one another's eyes.

The door opened and the servant announced that luncheon was ready. Duroy gravely offered his arm.

They sat down opposite one another, continually gazing and smiling at each other, solely taken up with each other. They ate without knowing what they were eating. He felt a foot, a little foot, straying under the table. He took it between his own and kept it there. The servant came and went, bringing and taking away the dishes with a careless air, without seeming to notice anything.

When they had finished they returned to the drawing-room and resumed their place on the sofa, side by side. Little by little he drew closer to her, striving to take her in his arms. But she calmly repulsed him, saying: "Take care; some one may come in."

He murmured: "When can I see you quite alone, to tell you how I love you?"

She leaned over toward him and whispered: "I will come and pay you a visit some of these days."

She named a day in the latter half of the week. He begged her to come sooner, playing with and squeezing her hands. She was amazed to see him implore her with such ardor and took off a day at a time. But he kept repeating: "To-morrow, only say to-morrow."

She consented at length. "Yes, to-morrow. At five o'clock."

The sound of the doorbell made them start, and with a bound they separated to a distance. She murmured: "It must be Laurine."

The child made her appearance, stopped short in amazement, and then ran to Duroy, clapping her hands with pleasure at seeing him, and exclaiming: "Ah! Bel-Ami."

Madame de Marelle began to laugh. "What! Bel-Ami! Laurine has baptized you. It's a nice little nickname for you, and I will call you Bel-Ami, too."

He had taken the little girl on his knee, and he had to play with her all the games he had taught her. He rose to take his leave at twenty minutes to three, to go to the office, and on the staircase, through the half-closed door, he still whispered: "To-morrow at five."

She answered: "Yes," with a smile, and disappeared.

As soon as he had got through his

day's work he speculated how he should arrange his room and hide as far as possible the poverty of the place. The idea struck him of pinning some little Japanese trifles on the walls, and he bought for five francs quite a collection of paper ornaments, little fans and screens, with which he hid the most glaring of the stains on the wall paper. He pasted on the window panes transparent pictures representing boats floating down rivers, flocks of birds flying across rosy skies, multi-colored ladies on balconies and processions of little black men on plains covered with snow. His room soon looked like the inside of a Chinese lantern. He thought the effect satisfactory and passed the evening in pasting on the ceiling birds that he cut out from the colored sheets remaining over. Then he went to bed.

He went home early the next day, carrying a paper bag of cakes and a bottle of Madeira, purchased at the grocer's.

Then he waited.

She came at about a quarter-past five; and, attracted by the bright colors of the pictures, exclaimed: "Why, how pretty your place is! But there are a great number of people on the stairs."

Her visit was a short one, and half an hour later he escorted her back to the cabstand in the Rue de Rome. When he was in the carriage he murmured: "Tuesday at the same time."

As the driver whipped up his horse, he exclaimed: "Good-by, Bel-Ami," and the old vehicle jogged along behind its old white horse.

For three weeks Duroy received Madame de Marelle in this way every two or three days, now in the afternoon and now in the morning. While he was expecting her one afternoon, a loud uproar on the stairs drew him to his door. A child was crying. A man's angry voice shouted: "What is that little devil howling about now?" The snapping, exasperated voice of a woman replied: "It is that woman who comes to see the penny-a-liner upstairs; she has upset Nicholas on the landing. It is people like that who pay no attention to children on the staircase."

Duroy drew back, distracted, for he could hear the quick rustling of skirts and a hurried step ascending the stairs to the floor beneath him. There was presently a knock at the door, which he had closed. He opened it, and Madame de Marelle rushed into the room, terrified and breathless, stammering: "Did you hear?"

He pretended to know nothing. "No; what?"

"How they have insulted me."

"Who? Who?"

"The wretches who live down below."

"Why, no; what does it all mean? Tell me."

She began to sob, without being able to utter a word. He had to take off her bonnet and moisten her forehead with a wet towel. She was choking, and when her emotion had somewhat abated, all her wrathful indignation burst forth. She wanted him to go down at once to thrash them, to kill them.

He repeated: "But they are only working people, peasants. Just think, you would have to go to court. One cannot lower one's self to have anything to do with such people."

She passed on to another idea. "What shall we do now? For my part, I cannot come here again."

He replied: "It is very simple; I

will move."

She murmured: "Yes, but that will take some time." Then, all at once, she framed a plan, and, reassured, added softly: "No, I know what to do; let me act, do not trouble yourself about anything. I will send you a telegram tomorrow morning."

As he usually rose late, he was still in bed the next day, when about eleven o'clock he received the promised telegram. He opened it and read:

Meet me at five, 127 Rue de Constantinople. Rooms hired by Madame Duroy. CLO.

At five o'clock to the minute he entered the janitor's room in a large furnished-room house and asked: "Is this where Madame Duroy has taken rooms?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will show me to them, if you please."

The man, doubtless used to delicate situations in which prudence is necessary, looked him straight in the eyes, and then, selecting one of the long range of keys, said: "You are Monsieur Duroy?"

"Yes, certainly."

The man opened the door of a small, two-room apartment on the ground floor, opposite his own. The sitting-room had a flowered wall paper, mahogany furniture covered with green rep with a yellow design, and a thin, flowered carpet through which one could feel the wooden flooring.

Duroy, uneasy and displeased, thought: "This place will cost goodness knows how much. I shall have to borrow again. It is idiotic, what she has done."

The door opened, and Clotilde came in like a whirlwind, with outstretched arms and rustling skirts. She was delighted. "Isn't it nice, eh? Isn't it nice? And on the ground floor, too; no stairs to go up."

He kissed her coldly, not daring to put the question that rose to his lips. She had placed a large parcel on the little round table in the middle of the room. And she played at moving in, finding a place for everything and deriving great amusement from it.

"It will be very convenient. If I get wet, for instance, while I am out, I can run in here to dry myself. We shall each have a key, besides the one left with the doorkeeper, in case we forget it. I have taken the place for three months, in your name, of course, since I could not give my own."

Then he said: "You will let me know when the rent is to be paid."

She replied simply: "But it is paid, dear."

"Then I owe it to you?"

"No, no, my dear; this is a little fancy of my own."

He seemed annoyed. "Oh, no, indeed; I can't allow that."

She implored him, but he held out, refusing with an irritated air, and then he yielded, thinking that, after all, it was fair. And when she had gone, he murmured, rubbing his hands and without inquiring in the depths of his heart why he thought so: "She is very interesting."

He received, a few days later, another telegram:

My husband returns to-night after six weeks' inspection, so we shall have a week off. CLO.

Duroy felt astounded. He no longer thought of her as being married. But here was a man whose face he would have liked to see just once, in order to know him. He patiently awaited the husband's departure, but he passed two evenings at the Folies-Bergère, which wound up with Rachel.

Then, one morning, came a fresh telegram:

To-day at five. Clo.

When they met, she said: "If you like, you may take me to dinner somewhere. I have kept myself disengaged."

It was the beginning of the month, and although he had some time before drawn his salary in advance, and was living from day to day upon money gleaned on every side, Duroy happened to be in funds, and was pleased at the opportunity of spending something upon her.

They started off, therefore, about seven, and gained the outer boulevard. She leaned on his arm and whispered in his ear: "If you only knew how happy it makes me to walk out on your arm; how I love to feel you beside me."

He said: "Would you like to go to Père Lathuile's?"

"Oh, no; it is too swell. I should like something funny, out of the way; a restaurant that salesmen and working girls go to. I adore dining at a country inn. Oh, if we had only been able to go into the country."

As he knew no such place in the neighborhood, they wandered along the boulevard and ended by going into a fine shop where there was a dining-room. She had seen through the windows two bareheaded girls seated at table with two soldiers. Three cab drivers were dining at the farther end of the long and narrow room, and an individual, impossible to classify under any calling, was smoking, stretched on a chair with his legs stuck out in front of him, his hands in the waistband of his trousers, and his head thrown back over the top bar. His jacket was a museum of stains, and in its swollen pockets could be noted the neck of a bottle, a piece of bread, a parcel wrapped up in a newspaper and a dangling piece of string. He had thick, tangled, curly hair, covered with dandruff, and his cap was on the floor, under his chair.

The entrance of Clotilde created a sensation, due to the elegance of her toilet. The two couples ceased whispering together, the three cab drivers left off arguing, and the man who was smoking, having taken his pipe from his mouth and expectorated, turned his head slightly to look.

Madame de Marelle murmured: "It is very nice; we shall be very comfortable here. Another time I will dress like a working-girl." And she sat down, without embarrassment or disgust, before the greasy wooden table, shiny from grease, washed by spilt liquors, and streaky from a hurried wipe with the waiter's napkin. Duroy, somewhat ill at ease and slightly ashamed, sought a peg to hang his hat on. Not finding one, he put it on a chair.

They had a ragout, a slice of melon and a salad. Clotilde repeated: "I delight in this. I have low tastes. I like this better than the Café Anglais." Then she added: "If you want to complete my enjoyment, you will take me to a dancing-place. I know a very funny

one close by, called the Reine Blanche."

Duroy, surprised at this, asked: "Whoever could have taken you there?"

He looked at her and saw her blush, somewhat disturbed, as though his sudden question aroused within her some delicate recollections. After one of those feminine hesitations, so short that they can scarcely be guessed, she replied: "A friend of mine," and then, after a brief silence, added, "who is dead." And she cast down her eyes with a very natural sadness.

Duroy, for the first time, thought of all that he did not know as regarded the past life of this woman. A vague jealousy, a species of enmity, awoke within him, an enmity against all that he did not know. He looked at her, irritated at the mystery wrapped up within that pretty, silent head, which was thinking, perhaps, at that very moment, of the other, the others, regretfully. How he would have liked to have looked into her recollections—to have known all.

She repeated: "Will you take me to the Reine Blanche? That will be a perfect treat."

He thought: "What matters the past? I am very foolish to bother about it," and smilingly replied: "Certainly, darling." When they were in the street she resumed, in that low and mysterious tone in which confidences are made: "I dared not ask you this until now, but you cannot imagine how I love these escapades in places ladies do not go to. During the carnival I will dress up as a schoolboy. I make such a capital boy."

When they entered the ballroom she kept close to him, gazing with delighted eyes on the young people, and from time to time, as though to secure herself from any possible danger, saying, as she noticed some serious and motionless police officer: "That is a strong-looking fellow." In a quarter of an hour she had had enough of it, and he escorted her home.

Then began quite a series of expeditions to all the queer places where the populace amuse themselves, and Duroy saw that she had quite a liking for this vagabondage of students bent on a spree. She came to their meeting place in a cotton frock and a servant's cap—a theatrical servant's cap—on her head; and despite the elegant and studied simplicity of her toilet, she retained her rings, her bracelets and her diamond earrings, saying, when he begged her to remove them: "Bah! They will think they are paste."

She thought she was admirably disguised, and although she was really only concealed after the fashion of an ostrich, she went into drinking-places of the worst repute. She wanted Duroy to dress himself like a workman, but he resisted, and retained his correct attire, not even consenting to exchange his tall hat for one of soft felt. She consoled herself for his obstinacy by the reflection that she would be taken for a chambermaid engaged in a love affair with a gentleman, and thought this delightful. In this guise they went into popular wine shops and sat down on rickety chairs at old wooden tables in smoke-filled rooms. A cloud of rank tobacco smoke, blended with the odor of fried fish remaining from dinner, filled the room; men in blouses shouted at one another as they tossed off *petits verres;* and the astonished waiter stared at this strange couple as he placed before them two cocktails. Trembling,

ılf-afraid and yet charmed, she began o sip the red liquid, looking round her vith uneasy and kindling eye. Each herry she swallowed gave her the sen- ation of a sin committed, each drop of he burning liquor flowing down her hroat gave her the enjoyment as of a orbidden pleasure.

Then she would say: "Let us go," nd they would leave. She would pass apidly, with bent head and the short teps of an actress leaving the stage, mong the drinkers, who, with their lbows on the tables, watched her go by vith suspicious and dissatisfied glances; nd when she had crossed the threshold he would give a deep sigh, as if she ad just escaped some terrible danger.

Sometimes she asked Duroy, with a hudder: "If I were insulted in these laces, what would you do?"

He would answer, with a swaggering ir: "Take your part, *parbleu!*"

And she would clasp his arm with appiness, with, perhaps, a vague wish o be insulted and defended, to see men ght on her account, even such men as ıose, with her admirer.

But these outings, taking place two r three times a week, began to weary uroy, who had found it difficult to ise the ten francs necessary for the ke and the drinks. He now had great fficulty in making his expenses, more than when he was a clerk in the orthern Railway; for having spent vishly during his first months of urnalism, in the constant hope of ining large sums in a day or two, he d exhausted all his resources and all eans of procuring money. A very mple method, that of borrowing from e cashier, was very soon exhausted; d he already owed the paper four months' salary, besides six hundred francs advanced for work. He owed, besides, a hundred francs to Forestier, three hundred to Jacques Rival, who was generous with his money; and he was also harassed by a number of small debts of from five francs to twenty. Saint-Potin, consulted as to the means of raising another hundred francs, had discovered no expedient, although a man of inventive mind, and Duroy was exasperated at this poverty, of which he was more sensible now than formerly, since he had more wants. A sullen rage against every one smouldered within him, and an ever-increasing irritation, which manifested itself at the most trivial causes. He sometimes asked himself how he could have spent an average of a thousand francs a month, without any extras or any foolish extravagances, and he found that, with a luncheon at eight francs and a dinner at twelve, partaken of in some large café on the boulevards, he soon got rid of a louis, which, added to ten francs pocket money—that pocket money that melts away, one does not know how—makes a total of thirty francs. But thirty francs a day is nine hundred francs at the end of the month. And he did not reckon in this the cost of clothes, boots, linen, washing, etc.

So on the 14th of December he found himself without a sou in his pocket, and without the slightest idea how to get any money. He went without luncheon and passed the afternoon working at the newspaper office, cross and preoccupied. About four o'clock he received a telegram from Madame de Marelle:

"Shall we dine together and have a lark afterward?"

He at once replied: "Cannot dine."

Then he reflected that he would be very stupid to deprive himself of the pleasant moments she might afford him and added: "But will await you at nine at our place." And, having sent one of the messengers with this, to save cost of a telegram, he began to reflect what he should do to procure himself a dinner.

At seven o'clock he had not yet hit upon anything and felt terribly empty. Then, in despair, he resorted to strategy. He let all his colleagues depart, one after the other, and when he was alone, rang sharply. Monsieur Walter's messenger, left in charge of his office, came in. Duroy was standing, feeling in his pockets, and said in an abrupt voice: "Foucart, I have left my purse at home, and I have to go and dine at the Luxembourg. Lend me fifty sous for my cab."

The man took three francs from his waistcoat pocket and said: "Do you want any more, sir?"

"No, no, that will be enough. Thanks."

And, having seized the coins, Duroy ran downstairs and dined at a popular-price restaurant to which he drifted on his days of poverty.

At nine o'clock he was awaiting Madame de Marelle, with his feet on the fender, in the little sitting-room. She came in, lively and animated, from the keen air of the street. "If you like," said she, "we will first go for a stroll. The weather is splendid for walking."

He replied in a grumbling tone: "Why go out? We are very comfortable here."

She said, without taking off her bonnet: "If you knew, the moonlight is beautiful. It is splendid walking about to-night."

"Perhaps so, but I do not care for walking about!"

He had said this in an angry fashion. She was struck and hurt by it, and asked: "What is the matter with you? Why do you act like that? I should like to go for a stroll, and I don't see why that should annoy you."

He got up in a rage. "It does not annoy me. It is a bother, that is all."

She was a woman whom resistance irritated and impoliteness exasperated, and she said disdainfully and with angry calm: "I am not accustomed to be spoken to like that. I will go alone, then. Good-by."

He saw that it was serious, and darting toward her, seized her hands, saying: "Forgive me, forgive me. I am very nervous this evening, very irritable. I have had vexations and annoyances, you know—matters of business."

She replied, somewhat softened, but not calmed down:

"That does not concern me, and I will not bear the brunt of your ill temper."

"Listen, darling. I did not want to hurt you; I was not thinking of what I was saying."

He had forced her to sit down, and kneeling before her, went on: "Have you forgiven me? Tell me you have forgiven me!"

She murmured coldly: "Very well, but do not do so again," and rising, she added: "Now let us go for a stroll."

He stammered: "Clo, my little Clo, I have a reason."

She stopped, and, looking him full in the face, said:

"You are lying. What is the reason?"

He caught her by the shoulders, and, in despair, ready to acknowledge anything in order to avoid a rupture, he said in a despairing tone: "I have not a sou. That is the reason."

She stopped short, and looking into his eyes to read the truth in them, said: "What do you say?"

He had flushed up to the roots of his hair. "I say that I have not a sou. Do you understand? Not twenty sous, not ten, not enough to pay for a glass of liqueur in any café we may go into. You force me to confess what I am ashamed of. It was, however, impossible for me to go out with you, and when we were seated with refreshments before us to tell you quietly that I could not pay for them."

She was still looking him in the face. "Well—is it all true?"

In a moment he had turned out all his pockets, those of his trousers, coat and waistcoat, and murmured: "There, are you satisfied now?"

Suddenly opening her arms, in an outburst of passion, she threw them around his neck, crying: "Oh, my poor boy, if I had only known. How did it happen?"

She made him sit down and obliged him to tell her how this misfortune had come about.

He invented a touching story. He had been obliged to assist his father, who had got into difficulties. He had not only handed over to him all his savings, but had even incurred heavy debts on his behalf. He added: "I shall have to starve for at least six months, for I have exhausted all my resources. It cannot be helped; there are crises in every life. Money, after all, is not worth troubling about."

She whispered: "I will lend you some. Will you let me?"

He answered with dignity: "You are very kind, pet; but do not think of that, I beg of you. You would hurt my feelings."

She was silent for some time and then she remarked smilingly: "How nice it is when one is in your position to find money you had forgotten in your pocket—a coin that had got in between the cloth and the lining."

He replied in a tone of conviction: "Ah, yes, indeed!"

She insisted on walking home, under the pretence that the moon was beautiful, and went into ecstasies over it. It was a cold, still night at the beginning of winter. Pedestrians and horses went by quickly, spurred by a sharp frost. Heels rang on the pavement.

As she left him she said: "Shall we meet again the day after to-morrow?"

"Certainly."

"At the same time."

"Good-by, dearest."

Then he walked home rapidly, wondering what he could think up on the morrow to help him out of his difficulty. But as he opened the door of his room, and fumbled in his waistcoat pocket for a match, he was stupefied to find a coin under his fingers. As soon as he struck a light he hastened to examine it. It was a louis. He thought he had gone crazy. He turned it over and over, wondering by what miracle it could have found its way there. It certainly could not have fallen from heaven into his pocket.

Then, all at once, he guessed, and he went to bed, his heart filled with anger and humiliation.

He woke late. He was hungry. He tried to go to sleep again, in order not to get up till two o'clock, and then said to himself: "That will not forward matters. I must end by finding some money." Then he went out, hoping that an idea might occur to him in the street.

It did not, but at every restaurant he passed a longing to eat made his mouth water. As by noon he had failed to hit on any plan, he suddenly made up his mind: "I will pay for breakfast out of Clotilde's twenty francs. That will not hinder me from paying her back to-morrow."

He therefore lunched for two francs fifty centimes. On reaching the office, he also gave three francs to the messenger, saying: "Here, Foucart, here is the money you lent me last night for my cab."

He worked till seven o'clock. Then he went and dined, taking another three francs. The two evening bocks brought the expenditure of the day up to nine francs thirty centimes. But as he could not get any more credit or create fresh resources in twenty-four hours, he borrowed another six francs fifty centimes the next day from the twenty he was going to return that very morning, so that he came to keep his appointment with just four francs twenty centimes in his pocket.

He was in a deuce of a temper, and promised himself that he would pretty soon explain things. He would say to Madame de Marelle: "You know, I found the twenty francs you slipped into my pocket the other day. I cannot give them back to you now, because my situation is unaltered, and I have not had time to occupy myself with money matters. But I will give them you the next time we meet."

She came in, anxious, full of alarm. How would he receive her?

He said to himself: "It will be time enough to enter into the matter by and by. I will find an opportunity of doing so."

He did not find the opportunity, and said nothing, shrinking from broaching this delicate subject. She did not speak of going out and was in every way charming. They separated early, after making an appointment for the Wednesday of the following week, for Madame de Marelle was engaged to dine out several days in succession.

The next day, as Duroy, on paying for his breakfast, felt for the four remaining sous, he perceived that there were five, and one of them a gold one. At first he thought that he had received it by mistake in his change the day before; then he understood it, and his heart throbbed with humiliation at this persistent charity. How he regretted not having said anything! If he had spoken energetically, this would not have happened.

For four days he made efforts, as numerous as they were fruitless, to raise five louis, and spent Clotilde's second coin. Although he had said to her savagely, "Don't play that joke of the other evenings again or I shall get angry," she managed to slip another twenty francs into his pocket the next time they met.

When he found them he swore bitterly and transferred them to his waistcoat to have them under his hand, for he had not a sou. He appeased his conscience by this argument: "I will give it her all back in a lump. After all, it is only borrowed money and can be repaid."

At length the cashier at the newspaper office agreed, on his urgent appeal, to let him have five francs daily. It was just enough to live upon, but not enough to repay sixty francs with. But as Clotilde was again seized with a

passion for nocturnal expeditions to all the suspicious localities in Paris, he ended by not being unbearably annoyed at finding a yellow coin in one of his pockets, one even in his boot, and another time in watch-case, after these escapades.

One evening she said to him: "Would you believe that I have never been to the Folies-Bergère? Will you take me there?"

He hesitated a moment, afraid of meeting Rachel. Then he thought: 'Bah! I am not married after all. If that girl sees me, she will understand the state of things, and will not speak to me. Besides, we will have a box."

He had another reason for his decision. He was well pleased at this opportunity of offering Madame de Marelle a box at the theatre without its costing anything. It was a kind of compensation.

They went in, and were received with bows by the acting manager. An immense crowd filled the foyer, and they had great difficulty in making their way through the swarm of men and women. At length they reached their box and settled themselves in it, shut in between the motionless orchestra and the restless gallery.

Suddenly she said: "There is a stout, dark girl who keeps watching us all the time. I thought just now that she was going to speak to us. Did you notice her?"

He answered: "No, you must be mistaken." But he had already noticed her. It was Rachel, who was walking up and down past their box, with anger in her eyes and hard words upon her lips.

Duroy had brushed against her in making his way through the crowd, and she had whispered: "Good-evening," with a wink which signified, "I understand." But he did not reply to this mark of attention, for fear of being seen by Madame de Marelle, and he had passed on coldly, with haughty look and disdainful lips. The woman, incited by unconscious jealousy, turned back, brushed against him again, and said in louder tones: "Good-evening, George." He had not answered even then. Then she had made up her mind to be recognized and greeted, and she kept continually passing the box, awaiting a favorable moment.

As soon as she saw that Madame de Marelle was looking at her, she touched Duroy's shoulder, saying: "Good-evening. Are you quite well?"

He made an angry movement and exclaimed in exasperated tones: "What do you mean by speaking to me? Be off, or I will have you locked up."

Then, with fiery eye and swelling bosom, she screamed out: "So that's it, is it? Ah, you scamp! It is no reason because you are with some one else that you should cut me to-day. If you had only nodded to me when I passed you just now, I should have left you alone. But you wanted to put on airs. I'll pay you out! Ah! so you won't say good-evening when you meet me?"

She would have gone on for a long time, but Madame de Marelle had opened the door of the box and fled through the crowd, blindly seeking the way out. Duroy darted after her, and strove to rejoin her, while Rachel, seeing them flee, yelled triumphantly: "Stop her, stop her; she has stolen my sweetheart!"

Every one began to laugh. Two gentlemen, in joke, seized the fugitive by the

shoulders and sought to bring her back. But Duroy, having caught up with her, freed her forcibly and led her away into the street. She jumped into an empty cab standing at the door. He jumped in after her, and when the driver asked, "Where to, sir?" replied, "Wherever you like!"

The cab slowly moved off, jolting over the cobble stones. Clotilde, seized by a kind of hysterical attack, sat choking and gasping, with her hands covering her face, and Duroy neither knew what to do nor what to say. At last, as he heard her sobbing, he stammered out:

"Clo, just listen; let me explain. It is not my fault. I used to know that woman some time ago, you know——"

She suddenly took the hands from her face, and overcome by the wrath of a loving and deceived woman, a furious wrath that enabled her to recover her speech, she stammered out in rapid broken sentences: "Oh, you wretch—you wretch—what a scoundrel you are! Can it be possible? How shameful! Oh, *mon Dieu!* How shameful!"

Suddenly she leaned out of the window, and, catching the driver by the sleeve, cried: "Stop!" And opening the door, sprang out.

George wanted to follow, but she cried: "I forbid you to get out!" in such loud tones that the passers-by began to gather about her, and Duroy did not move, for fear of a scandal. She then took her purse from her pocket and looked for some change by the light of the cab lantern, and taking out two francs fifty centimes, she put them in the driver's hand, saying in ringing tones:

"There is your fare. I am paying you, and now take this blackguard to the Rue Boursault, Batignolles."

Those surrounding her began to laugh. A gentleman said: "Well done, little woman," and a young scalawag standing close to the cab thrust his head into the door and sang out in shrill tones:

"Good-night, lovey!"

Then the cab started off again, followed by a burst of laughter.

CHAPTER VI

A LONG STEP FORWARD

Duroy woke up crestfallen the next morning. He dressed himself slowly and then sat down at his window and began to reflect. He felt a kind of aching sensation all over, just as though he had received a drubbing over night. At last the necessity of finding some money spurred him up, and he went first to Forestier.

His friend received him in his study, sitting before the fire.

"What has brought you out so early?" said he.

"A very serious matter, a debt of honor."

"At play?"

He hesitated a moment and then said: "At play."

"Heavy?"

"Five hundred francs."

He only owed two hundred and eighty.

Forestier, sceptical on the point, inquired: "Whom do you owe it to?"

Duroy could not answer right off. "To—to—a Monsieur de Carleville."

"Ah! and where does he live?"

"At—at——"

Forestier began to laugh. "Number naught, Nowhere Street, eh? I know that gentleman, my dear fellow. If you want twenty francs, I have still that much at your service, but no more."

Duroy took the proffered louis. Then he went from house to house among the people he knew, and wound up by having collected at about five o'clock the sum of eighty francs. As he still needed two hundred more, he came to a decision, and keeping for himself what he had thus gleaned, murmured: "Bah! I am not going to put myself out. I will pay her when I can."

For a fortnight he lived regularly, economically and chastely, his mind filled with good resolves. This sudden reformation did not last long, and he went one evening to the Folies-Bergère, in the hope of finding Rachel. He caught sight of her directly he entered, for she scarcely went anywhere else. He went up to her, smiling, with outstretched hand, but she merely looked him down from head to foot, saying: "What do you want with me?"

He tried to laugh it off with: "Come, don't be stuck up."

She turned on her heel, saying: "I don't associate with men of your stamp."

She had picked out the bitterest insult. He felt the blood rush to his face and went home alone.

Forestier, ill, weak, always coughing, led him a hard life at the paper and seemed to rack his brain to find him tiresome jobs. One day, even, in a moment of nervous irritation, and after a long fit of choking, as Duroy had not brought him a piece of information he wanted, he growled out: "Confound it! You are a bigger fool than I thought."

The other almost struck him, but restrained himself, and went away muttering: "I'll manage to pay you out some day." An idea occurred to him, and he added: "I'll make a fool of you, old fellow!" And he took himself off, rubbing his hands, delighted at this project.

He resolved to pay Madame Forestier a visit, to spy out the land. He found her reclining on a couch, reading a book. She held out her hand, without rising, merely turning her head, and said: "Good-day, Bel-Ami!"

He felt as though he had received a blow. "Why do you call me that?" he said.

She replied with a smile: "I saw Madame de Marelle the other day and learned how you had been baptized at her place."

He felt reassured by her amiable air. Besides, what was there for him to fear?

She resumed: "You spoil her. As to me, people come to see me when they think of it—the thirty-sixth of the month or thereabout."

He sat down near her and regarded her with a new species of curiosity, the curiosity of the amateur who is bargain-hunting.

He said resolutely: "I did not come to see you because it was better so."

She asked, without understanding: "What? Why?"

"Why? Cannot you guess?"

"No, not at all."

"Because I am afraid that I might fall in love with you."

She seemed neither astonished, nor shocked, nor flattered; she went on smiling the same indifferent smile and replied with the same tranquillity: "Oh, you can come, all the same. No one is in love with me long."

He was surprised more by the tone than the words and asked: "Why not?"

"Because it is useless. I let this be understood at once. If you had told me of your fear before, I should have reassured you and invited you, on the contrary, to come as often as possible."

He exclaimed in a pathetic tone: "Can we command our feelings?"

She turned toward him: "My dear friend, for me a man in love is struck off the list at once. He becomes idiotic, and not only idiotic but dangerous. I cease all relations with people who are in love with me, or who pretend to be so—because they bore me, in the first place, and, secondly, because they are as much objects of suspicion to me as a mad dog, which may have a fit of biting. I therefore put them into a kind of moral quarantine until the attack is over. Do not forget this. I know very well that in your case love is only a species of appetite, while with me it would be, on the contrary, a kind of—of—of communion of souls which does not enter into a man's religion. You understand its letter, I its spirit. But look me well in the face." She no longer smiled. Her face was calm and cold and she continued emphatically: "And now that we understand each other, will you agree to be friends—good friends—real friends, I mean, without any mental reservation?"

He made up his mind at once, and, delighted at being able to secure this ally in the battle of life, held out both hands, saying: "I am yours, madame—Bel-Ami."

She read the sincerity of his intention in his voice and gave him her hands. He kissed them both, one after the other, and then said simply, as he raised his head: "Ah! if I had found a woman like you, how gladly I would have married her."

She was touched this time—soothed by this phrase as women are by the compliments which reach their hearts, and she gave him one of those rapid and grateful looks which make us their slaves. Then, as he could find no change of subject to renew the conversation, she said softly, laying her finger on his arm: "And I am going to play my part of a friend at once. You are clumsy." She hesitated a moment and then asked: "May I speak plainly?"

"Yes."

"Quite plainly?"

"Quite."

"Well, go and see Madame Walter, who greatly appreciates you, and do your best to please her. You will find a place there for your compliments, although she is, you understand me, a perfectly virtuous woman. Oh, there is no hope for poachers there. You may find something better, though, by going about more. I know that you still hold a subordinate position on the paper. But do not be afraid; they receive all their staff with the same kindness. Go there, take my advice."

He said with a smile: "Thank you; you are an angel, a guardian angel."

They spoke of one thing and another.

He stayed some time, wishing to prove that he took pleasure in being with her, and on leaving, remarked: "It is understood, then, that we are friends."

"It is understood."

As he had noted the effect of the compliment he had paid her shortly before, he seconded it by adding: "And if ever you become a widow, I enter the lists."

Then he hurried away, so as not to give her time to get angry.

A visit to Madame Walter was rather awkward for Duroy, for he had not been invited to call, and he did not want to commit a blunder.

One day, however, having risen early, he went to the market and for ten francs obtained a score of splendid pears. Having carefully packed them in a hamper to make it appear that they had come from a distance, he left them with the concierge at Madame Walter's, with his card, on which he had written: "George Duroy begs Madame Walter to accept a little fruit which he received this morning from Normandy."

He found the next morning, among his letters at the office, an envelope in reply, containing the card of Madame Walter, who "thanked Monsieur George Duroy, and was at home every Saturday."

On the following Saturday he called. Monsieur Walter lived on the Boulevard Malesherbes, in a double house, which he owned, part of which he rented to another family.

Two footmen were dozing on benches. One of them took Duroy's overcoat and the other relieved him of his cane, opened a door, advanced a few steps in front of his visitor, and then, drawing aside, let him pass, calling out his name, into an empty room.

The young fellow, somewhat embarrassed, looked around on all sides, when he perceived in a mirror some people sitting down, who seemed very far off. He passed through two empty reception rooms and reached a sort of small boudoir hung with blue silk, where four ladies were chatting round a table on which were cups of tea. In spite of the assurance he had acquired during his residence in Paris, and, above all, in his career as a reporter, which constantly brought him in contact with important personages, Duroy felt somewhat abashed at the elegance of the house and at having to walk through the deserted drawing-rooms. He stammered: "Madame, I have ventured," as his eyes sought the mistress of the house.

She held out her hand, which he took with a bow, and having remarked, "You are very kind, sir, to call and see me," she pointed to a chair, into which he almost fell, being deceived as to its height.

They had become silent. One of the ladies began to talk again.

Madame Walter noticed that Duroy had not said anything, that he had not been spoken to, and that he seemed slightly ill at ease; and as the ladies were still conversing about the Academy, that favorite subject always occupying them some time, she said: "And you, who should be better informed than any one, Monsieur Duroy, who is your favorite?"

He replied unhesitatingly: "In this matter, madame, I should never consider the merit, always disputable of the candidates, but their age and their state of health. I should not ask about their

credentials, but their disease. I should not seek to learn whether they have made a metrical translation of Lope de Vega, but I should take care to obtain information as to the state of their liver and other organs. For me, a good hypertrophy, a good aneurism, and, above all, a good beginning of locomotor ataxia, would be a hundred times more valuable than forty volumes of digressions on the idea of patriotism as embodied in barbaric poetry."

An astonished silence followed this opinion, and Madame Walter asked, with a smile: "But why?"

He replied: "Because I never look for anything but the enjoyment that ladies derive from a subject. Now, madame, the Academy only has any real interest for you when an Academician dies. The more of them that die the happier you are. But in order that they may die quickly, they must be elected when they are infirm or old." As they all seemed somewhat surprised, he continued: "I am like you; I like to read of the death of an Academician. I at once ask myself: 'Who will replace him?' And I draw up my list. It is a game, a very pretty little game that is played in all Parisian salons at the decease of each of the Immortals, the game of 'Death and the Forty Ancients.' "

The ladies, still slightly disconcerted, began, however, to smile, so true were his remarks. He concluded, as he rose: "It is you who really elect them, ladies, and you only elect them to see them die. Choose them old, therefore, very old, as old as possible, and don't trouble yourselves about anything else."

He then retired very gracefully. As soon as he was gone, one of the ladies said: "He is very comical, that young fellow. Who is he?"

Madame Walter replied: "One of our staff who attends to minor work, but I feel sure that he will get on."

Duroy strode gaily down the Boulevard Malesherbes, pleased at his first attempt and murmuring: "A capital start."

He made it up with Rachel that evening.

The following week two things happened to him. He was made news editor-in-chief and invited to dinner at Madame Walter's. He traced at once a connection between these things.

Monsieur Walter, who thoroughly appreciated him, had, however, often wished for another man to whom to intrust the "Echoes," which he held to be the very marrow of the paper. It is through them that rumors are set afloat, and the public and the funds influenced. It is necessary to know how to slip the all-important matter, rather hinted at than said right out, in between the description of two fashionable entertainments, without appearing to intend it. Things should be hinted at in such a manner as to allow of any construction being placed on them, refuted in a manner that confirms the rumor or affirmed in such a way that no one believes them.

Monsieur Boisrenard, who had the skill acquired by long practice, nevertheless lacked virility and elegance; he lacked, above all, the inborn tact required in order to read the manager's mind day by day. Duroy could do it to perfection, and was an admirable addition to the staff. The wire-pullers and real editors of the *Vie Française* were half a dozen deputies, interested in all the speculations brought out or backed up by the manager. They were known

in the Chamber as "Walter's gang," and envied because they gained money with him and through him. Forestier, the political editor, was only the man of straw of these men of business, the worker-out of ideas suggested by them. They prompted his editorials on the money markets, which he always wrote at home, where he could be quiet, he said.

Duroy was jubilant at his appointment as editor of the "Echoes," when he received a printed card on which he read: "Monsieur and Madame Walter request the pleasure of Monsieur George Duroy's company at dinner on Thursday, January 20." This new mark of favor, following on the other, filled him with such joy that he kissed the invitation as he would have kissed a love letter. Then he went in search of the cashier, to deal with the important question of money. The news editor on a Paris paper generally has his budget out of which he pays his reporters for the intelligence, important or trifling, brought in by them, as gardeners bringing in their fruits to a dealer. Twelve hundred francs a month were allotted at the outset to Duroy, who proposed to himself to retain a considerable share of it. The cashier, on his urgent representation, ended by advancing him four hundred francs. He had at first intended to send Madame de Marelle the two hundred and eighty francs he owed her, but he almost immediately reflected that he would only have a hundred and twenty left, a sum utterly insufficient to carry on his new duties in suitable fashion, and so put off this restitution to a future day.

It took him a couple of days to settle down in his new position, for he had inherited a table to himself and a set of pigeonholes in the large room occupied by the entire editorial staff. He occupied his spare time playing cup and ball. Duroy had acquired a taste for this amusement, and was beginning to get expert at it, under the guidance, and thanks to the advice of, Saint-Potin.

"One—two—three—four—five—six." It happened that, for the first time, he spiked the ball twenty times running, the very day that he was to dine at Madame Walter's. "A good day," he thought; "I am successful in everything." For skill at cup and ball really conferred a kind of superiority in the office of the *Vie Française*.

He left the office early, to have time to dress, and was going up the Rue de Londres, when he saw, trotting along in front of him, a little woman whose figure recalled that of Madame de Marelle. He felt his cheeks flush, and his heart began to beat. He crossed the road to get a view of her. She stopped, in order to cross over, too. He had made a mistake, and breathed again. He had often asked how he ought to behave if he met her face to face. Should he bow, or should he appear not to have seen her? "I would not see her," he thought.

When he got home he thought: "I must change my lodgings; this is no longer good enough for me." He felt nervous and lively, capable of anything; and he said aloud, as he walked from his bed to the window: "Fortune is here at last! Fortune is here! I must write to father." From time to time he wrote to his father, and the letter always brought happiness to the little Norman inn by the roadside, at the summit of the slope overlooking Rouen and the broad valley of the Seine. From

time to time, too, he received a blue envelope, addressed in a large, shaky hand, and read the same unvarying lines at the beginning of the paternal epistle: "My dear son, this leaves your mother and myself in good health. There is not much news here. I must tell you, however," etc. In his heart he retained a feeling of interest for the village matters, for the news of the neighbors and the condition of the crops.

He repeated to himself, as he tied his white tie before his little looking-glass: "I must write to father to-morrow. If the old fellow could see me this evening in the house I am going to, wouldn't he be astonished! By Jove! I am going to have such a dinner as he has never tasted." And he suddenly saw the dark kitchen behind the empty café, the copper stewpans casting their yellow reflections on the wall; the cat on the hearth, with her nose to the fire, in sphinx-like attitude; the wooden table, greasy with time and spilled liquids, a soup tureen smoking upon it, and a lighted candle between two plates. He saw them, too—his father and mother, two slow-moving peasants, eating their soup. He knew the smallest wrinkles on their old faces, the slightest movements of their arms and heads. He knew even what they talked about every evening as they sat at supper. He thought, too: "I must really go and see them." But, his toilet being ended, he blew out his light and went downstairs.

He entered the anteroom, lighted by tall bronze candelabra, with confidence, and handed his cane and overcoat quite naturally to two valets who approached. All the drawing-rooms were illuminated. Madame Walter received her guests in the second, the largest. She welcomed him with a charming smile, and he shook hands with two gentlemen who had arrived before him—Monsieur Firmin and Monsieur Laroche-Mathieu, deputies and anonymous editors of the *Vie Française*. Monsieur Laroche-Mathieu had special authority at the office, due to his influence in the Chamber. No one doubted his being a minister some day. Then came the Forestiers, the wife in pink and looking charming. Duroy was astonished to see her on terms of intimacy with the two deputies. She chatted in low tones with Monsieur Laroche-Mathieu for more than five minutes beside the fireplace. Charles seemed worn out. He had grown much thinner during the past month, and coughed incessantly as he repeated: "I should make up my mind to finish the winter in the south." Norbert de Varenne and Jacques Rival made their appearance together. Then, as a door opened at the farther end of the room, Monsieur Walter came in with two tall young girls, of from sixteen to eighteen, one ugly, the other pretty.

Duroy knew that the chief was the father of a family, but he was struck with astonishment. He had never thought of his daughters, save as one thinks of distant countries which one will never see. And then he had fancied them quite young; and here they were, grown-up women. They held out their hands to him after being introduced, and then went and sat down at a little table, without doubt reserved for them. Some one was still expected, and all were silent with that sense of oppression preceding dinner among people whose mental atmosphere differs at the close of their various daily occupations.

Duroy having aimlessly raised his eyes

toward the walls, Monsieur Walter called to him from a distance, with an evident wish to show off his property: "Are you looking at my pictures? I will show them to you"; and he took a lamp, so that the details might be distinguished.

Stopping before the next wall, he announced in a grave tone, like a master of ceremonies: "High art." There were four: "A Hospital Visit," by Gervex; "A Harvester," by Bastien-Lepage; "A Window," by Bouguereau; and "An Execution," by Jean Paul Laurens. Then the governor showed a Detaille, "The Lesson," which represented a soldier in a barrack room teaching a poodle to play the drum, and said: "That is very witty."

Duroy laughed and exclaimed:

"It is charming, charm——" He stopped short on hearing behind him the voice of Madame de Marelle, who had just come in.

M. Walter continued to light up the pictures as he explained them. But Duroy saw nothing, and heard without understanding. Madame de Marelle was there behind him. What ought he to do? If he spoke to her, might she not turn her back on him, or treat him with insolence? If he did not approach her, what would people think? He said to himself: "I will gain time, at any rate." He was so upset that for a moment he thought of feigning a sudden indisposition, which would allow him to withdraw.

The examination of the walls was over. M. Walter went to put down his lamp and welcome the last comer, while Duroy began to re-examine the pictures, as if he could not tire of admiring them. He was quite overcome. What should he do? Madame Forestier called to him: "Monsieur Duroy!" He went to her. It was to speak to him of a friend of hers who was about to give a fête and who would like to have a line to that effect in the *Vie Française*. He gasped out: "Certainly, madame, most certainly."

Madame de Marelle was now quite close to him. He dared not turn round to go away. All at once he thought he was going crazy; she had said aloud: "Good-evening, Bel-Ami. So you no longer recognize me."

He immediately turned round. She stood before him, smiling, her eyes beaming with sprightliness and affection, and held out her hand. He took it tremblingly, still fearing some trick, some perfidy. She added calmly: "What has become of you? One no longer sees anything of you."

He stammered, without recovering his presence of mind: "I have a great deal to do, madame, a great deal to do. Monsieur Walter has entrusted me with new duties which keep me very busy."

She replied, still looking him in the face, but without his being able to discover anything save good will in her glance: "I know it. But that is no reason why you should forget your friends."

They were separated by a stout lady with red arms and red face, who just came in, with an elaborate dress cut very low, and walking so heavily that one guessed by her motions the size and weight of her legs. As she seemed to be treated with great attention, Duroy asked Madame Forestier: "Who is that lady?"

"The Vicomtesse de Percemur, who signs her articles 'Lily Fingers.'"

He was astounded and felt inclined to laugh. "'Lily Fingers,' 'Lily Fingers.' And I, who imagined her young like yourself. So that is 'Lily Fingers.' That is very funny, very funny."

A servant appeared in the doorway and announced dinner. The dinner was commonplace and lively, one of those dinners at which people talk about everything without saying anything. Duroy found himself between the elder daughter of the master of the house, the ugly one, Mademoiselle Rose, and Madame de Marelle. The vicinity of the latter embarrassed him somewhat, although she seemed very much at her ease, and chatted with her usual vivacity. He was disturbed at first, constrained, hesitating like a musician who has lost the keynote. By degrees, however, he recovered his assurance, and their eyes continually meeting, questioned one another, exchanging looks in an intimate fashion as of old. What did they say then? Not much, but their lips quivered every time that they looked at each other.

The young fellow, however, wishing to do the amiable to his employer's daughter, spoke to her from time to time. She replied as the mother would have done, never hesitating as to what she should say. On the right of Monsieur Walter, the Vicomtesse de Percemur gave herself the airs of a princess, and Duroy, amused at watching her, said in a low voice to Madame de Marelle: "Do you know the other, the one who signs her articles 'Pink Domino'?"

"Yes, very well; the Baroness de Livar."

"Is she of the same variety?"

"No, but quite as funny. A tall, dried-up woman of sixty, false curls, projecting teeth, ideas dating from the Restoration and toilets of the same epoch."

"Where did they unearth these literary phenomena?"

"Waifs of the nobility are always lionized by *bourgeois parvenus.*"

"No other reason?"

"None."

Then a political discussion began between the master of the house, the two deputies, Norbert de Varenne and Jacques Rival and lasted till dessert.

When they returned to the drawing-room, Duroy again approached Madame de Marelle, and looking her in the eyes, said: "Shall I see you home to-night?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because Monsieur Laroche-Mathieu, who is my neighbor, sees me to my door every time I dine here."

"When shall I see you?"

"Come and lunch with me to-morrow."

And they separated without saying anything more.

Duroy did not remain late, finding the evening dull. As he went downstairs he overtook Norbert de Varenne, who was also leaving. The old poet took him by the arm. No longer having to fear any rivalry in the paper, their work being essentially different, he now manifested a fatherly kindness toward the young fellow.

"Well, will you walk home a bit of my way with me?" said he.

"With pleasure," replied Duroy.

And they went out, walking slowly along the Boulevard Malesherbes. Paris was almost deserted that night—a cold night; one of those nights in which space seems vaster than on others, when

the stars seem higher and the air bears on its icy breath something coming from beyond the stars. The two men did not speak at first. Then Duroy, in order to say something, remarked: "You are gloomy to-day, dear master."

The poet replied: "I am always so, my lad; so will you be in a few years. Life is a hill. As long as one is climbing up one looks toward the summit and is happy, but when one reaches the top one suddenly perceives the descent before him, and its end, which is death. One climbs up slowly, but one goes down quickly. At your age one is happy. One hopes for many things which, however, never come to pass. At my age one no longer expects anything—but death."

Duroy began to laugh: "You make chills run down my back."

Norbert de Varenne went on: "No, you do not understand me now, but later on you will remember what I am saying to you at this moment. A day comes, and it comes early for many, when there is an end to mirth, for behind everything one looks at one sees death. You do not even understand the word. At your age it means nothing; at mine it is terrible. Yes, one understands it all at once, one does not know how or why, and then everything in life changes its aspect. To live, in short, is to die. I now see death so near that I often want to stretch out my arms to push it back. I see it everywhere. The insects crushed on the path, the falling leaves, the white hair in a friend's head rend my heart and cry to me: 'Behold it!' It spoils for me all I do, all I see, all that I eat and drink, all that I love; the bright moonlight, the sunrise, the broad ocean, the noble rivers, and the soft summer evening air so sweet to breathe."

He stopped, reflected for a few moments, and then, with a look of resignation, said: "I am a lost creature. I have neither father nor mother, nor sister nor brother; no wife, no children, no God."

He added, after a pause: "I have only poetry."

They reached the Pont de la Concorde, crossed it in silence, and walked past the Palais Bourbon. Norbert de Varenne began to speak again, saying: "Get married, my friend; you do not know what it is to live alone at my age. Solitude now fills me with horrible agony—solitude at home by the fireside of a night. It is so profound, so sad; the silence of the room in which one dwells alone. It is not alone the silence that surrounds the body, but the silence around the soul; and when the furniture creaks, I tremble all over, for no sound is expected in my gloomy dwelling." He was silent again for a moment and then added: "When one is old it is good to have children."

They had got halfway down the Rue de Bourgogne. The poet stopped in front of a high house, rang the bell, shook Duroy by the hand and said:

"Forget all this old man's doddering, young man, and live as befits your age. Good-night."

And he disappeared in the dark passage.

Duroy resumed his route with a pain at his heart. It seemed to him as though he had been shown a hole filled with bones, an unavoidable gulf into which all must fall one day. He muttered: "By Jove! it can't be very lively in his place. I should not care for a front seat

to see the procession of his thoughts. The deuce, no!"

But having paused to allow a perfumed lady to alight from her carriage and enter her house, he drew in with eager breath, as she passed him, the scent of verbena and orris floating in the air. His lungs and heart throbbed suddenly with hope and joy, and the recollection of Madame de Marelle, whom he was to see the next day, came vividly to mind. Everything smiled on him, life welcomed him with kindness. How sweet is the realization of one's hopes!

Madame de Marelle received him as though no rupture had taken place. Then she said: "You don't know what a vexation has happened to me, darling. My husband is home for six weeks. He has obtained leave. But I won't remain six weeks without seeing you, especially after our little tiff, and this is how I have arranged matters. You are to come and dine with us on Monday. I have already spoken to him about you, and I will introduce you."

Duroy hesitated, somewhat perplexed. He was afraid lest something might betray him—a slight embarrassment, a look, no matter what. He stammered out: "No, I would rather not make your husband's acquaintance."

She insisted, very much astonished, standing before him with wide-open, wondering eyes. "But why? What a funny thing. I should not have thought you such a goose."

He was hurt and said: "Very well, then, I will come to dinner on Monday."

She went on: "In order that it may seem more natural, I will ask the Forestiers, though I really do not like entertaining people at home."

Until Monday, Duroy scarcely thought any more about the interview, but on mounting the stairs at Madame de Marelle's he felt strangely uneasy, not that it was so repugnant to him to take her husband's hand, to drink his wine and eat his bread, but because he apprehended something, without knowing what. He was shown into the drawing-room and waited as usual. Soon the door of the inner room opened, and he saw a tall, white-bearded man, wearing the ribbon of the Legion of Honor, grave and correct, who advanced toward him with punctilious politeness, saying: "My wife has often spoken to me of you, sir, and I am delighted to make your acquaintance."

Duroy stepped forward, assuming an expression of excessive cordiality, and grasped his host's hand with exaggerated energy. Then, sitting down, he could find nothing to say.

Monsieur de Marelle placed a log upon the fire and inquired: "Have you been long engaged in journalism?"

"Only a few months."

"Ah! You have got on quickly?"

"Yes, fairly so," and he began to chat at random, without thinking very much about what he was saying, talking of all the trifles customary among men who do not know one another.

Madame de Marelle came in suddenly, and having taken in matters with a smiling, impenetrable glance, went toward Duroy, who dared not, in the presence of her husband, kiss her hand as he always did. She was calm and light-hearted as a woman of the world, this meeting seeming quite natural to her frank and inborn trickiness. Laurine appeared and went and held up her forehead to George more quietly than usual,

her father's presence intimidating her. Her mother said to her: "Well, you don't call him Bel-Ami to-day." And the child blushed as if a serious indiscretion had been committed, a thing revealed that ought not to have been mentioned, an intimate and, so to say, guilty secret of her heart laid bare.

When the Forestiers arrived, all were alarmed at the condition of Charles. He had grown frightfully thin and pale within a week and coughed incessantly. He told them that he was leaving for Cannes on the following Thursday, by the doctor's imperative orders. They left early, and Duroy said, shaking his head: "I think he is very bad. He will never make old bones."

Madame de Marelle said calmly: "Oh, he is done for. There is a man who was lucky in finding the wife he did."

Duroy asked: "Does she help him much?"

"She does everything. She is acquainted with everything that is going on; she knows every one without seeming to go and see anybody; she gets what she wants as she wants it and when she wants it. Oh, she is keen, clever and intriguing as no one else is. She would be a treasure for any one wanting to get on."

George said: "She will marry again very quickly, no doubt?"

Madame de Marelle replied: "Yes, I should not be surprised if she had some one in view—a deputy, unless, indeed, he objects—for—for—there may be serious—moral—obstacles. But then—I don't really know."

Monsieur de Marelle grumbled, with slow impatience: "You are always suspecting a number of things, and I do not like it. Do not let us meddle with the affairs of others. We have enough to do to guide our own conscience. That should be a rule with every one."

Duroy withdrew, uneasy at heart, and with his mind full of vague plans. The next day he paid a visit to the Forestiers and found them finishing their packing. Charles, stretched on a sofa, exaggerated his difficulty of breathing and repeated: "I ought to have been off a month ago."

Then he gave George a series of orders concerning the paper, although everything had been agreed upon and settled with Monsieur Walter. As George left, he energetically squeezed his old comrade's hand, saying: "Well, old man, we shall have you back soon." But as Madame Forestier was showing him out, he said to her quickly: "You have not forgotten our agreement? We are friends and allies, are we not? So if you have need of me, for no matter what, do not hesitate to call on me. Send a letter or a telegram, and I will obey."

She murmured: "Thank you, I will not forget." And her eyes, too, said: "Thank you" in a deeper and tenderer fashion.

As Duroy went downstairs, he met, slowly coming up, Monsieur de Vaudrec, whom he had met there once before. The comte appeared sad, and at this departure perhaps. Wishing to show his good breeding, the journalist eagerly bowed. The other returned the salutation courteously, but in a somewhat dignified manner.

The Forestiers left on Thursday evening.

CHAPTER VII

A MEANS TO AN END

CHARLES' absence gave Duroy an increased importance in the editorial department of the *Vie Française*. He signed several editorials, besides his "Echoes," for the manager insisted on every one assuming the responsibility of his own "copy." He became engaged in several newspaper controversies, in which he acquitted himself creditably, and his constant relations with different statesmen were gradually preparing him to become in his turn a clever and discriminating political editor. There was only one cloud on his horizon. It came from a little free-lance newspaper which continually assailed him, or, rather, in him assailed the editor of "Echoes" in the *Vie Française*, the editor of "Monsieur Walter's startlers," according to the anonymous writer of the *Plume*. Day by day cutting paragraphs, insinuations of every kind, appeared in it.

One day Jacques Rival said to Duroy: "You are very patient."

Duroy replied: "What can I do? There is no direct attack."

But one afternoon, as he entered the editor's room, Boisrenard held out the current number of the *Plume*, saying: "Here's another spiteful dig at you."

"Ah! what about?"

"Oh, a mere nothing—the arrest of a Madame Aubert by the Society for the Prevention of Vice."

George took the paper and read, under the heading, "Duroy's latest":

"The illustrious reporter of the *Vie Française* to-day informs us that Madame Aubert, whose arrest by an agent of the odious S. P. V. we announced, exists only in our imagination. Now, the person in question lives at 18 Rue de l'Ecureuil, Montmartre. As to the reporter of whom it is a question, he would do better to give us one of those good sensational bits of news of which he has the secret—news of deaths contradicted the following day, news of battles which have never taken place, announcements of important utterances by sovereigns who have not said anything—all the news, in short, which constitutes Walter's profits, or even one of those little indiscretions concerning entertainments given by would-be fashionable ladies, or the excellence of certain articles of consumption which are a means of income to some of our colleagues of the press."

The young fellow was more astonished than annoyed, only understanding that there was something very disagreeable for him in all this.

Boisrenard went on: "Who gave you that piece of gossip?"

Duroy thought for a moment, having forgotten. Then all at once the recollection occurred to him, "Saint-Potin." He reread the paragraph in the *Plume* and reddened, roused by the accusation of graft. He exclaimed: "What! Do they mean to assert that I am paid——"

Boisrenard interrupted him: "Why, yes. It is very annoying for you. The governor is very strict about that sort of thing. It might so often occur in

the 'Echoes.'"

Saint-Potin came in at that moment. Duroy went to meet him. "Have you seen the paragraph in the *Plume?*"

"Yes, and I have just come from Madame Aubert. She does exist, but she was not arrested. That much of the report has no foundation."

Duroy hastened to the room of the manager, whom he found somewhat cool and with a look of suspicion in his eye. After having listened to the statement of the case, Monsieur Walter said: "Go and see the woman yourself and contradict the paragraph in such terms as will put a stop to such things being written about you any more. I mean the latter part of the paragraph. It is very annoying for the paper, for yourself and for me. A journalist should no more be suspected than Cæsar's wife."

Duroy got into a cab, with Saint-Potin as his guide, and called out to the driver: "Number 18 Rue de l'Ecureuil, Montmartre."

It was a huge house, and he had to scale six flights of stairs. An old woman in a woolen jacket opened the door to them. "What is it you want with me now?" said she on catching sight of Saint-Potin.

He replied: "I have brought this gentleman, who is an inspector of police, and who would like to hear your story."

Then she let them in, saying: "Two more have been here since you, from some paper or other, I don't know which." Then, turning toward Duroy, she added: "So this gentleman wants to know about it?"

"Yes. Were you arrested by the society?"

She raised her arms in the air. "Never in my life, sir, never in my life. This is what it was all about. I have a butcher who sells good meat, but who gives bad weight. I have often noticed it without saying anything; but the other day, when I asked him for two pounds of chops, as I had my daughter and my son-in-law to dinner, I caught him weighing in bits of trimmings—trimmings of chops, it is true, but not of mine. I could have made a stew of them, it is true, but when I ask for chops it is not to get other people's trimmings. I refused to take them, and he calls me an old shark. I call him an old rogue, and from one thing to another, we raised such a row that there were over a hundred people round the shop, some of them laughing to kill themselves. So that at last a police officer came up and asked us to settle it at the police station. We went, and the captain dismissed the case. Since then I get my meat elsewhere, and don't even pass his door, in order to avoid any disturbance."

She ceased talking, and Duroy asked: "Is that all?"

"It is the whole truth, sir," and having offered him a glass of liqueur, which he declined, the old woman insisted on the short weight of the butcher being spoken of in the report.

On his return to the office, Duroy wrote his reply:

"An anonymous scribbler in the *Plume* seeks to pick a quarrel with me on the subject of an old woman whom he states was arrested by an *agent des mœurs,* which fact I deny. I have myself seen Madame Aubert—who is at least sixty years of age—and she told me in detail her quarrel with the butcher over the weighing of some chops, which

led to an explanation before the commissary of police. This is the whole truth. As to the other insinuations of the writer in the *Plume,* I despise them. Besides, a man does not reply to such things when they are written anonymously.

GEORGE DUROY."

Monsieur Walter and Jacques Rival, who had come in, thought this note satisfactory, and it was settled that it should go in at once.

Duroy went home early, somewhat agitated and slightly uneasy. What reply would the other man make? Who was he? Why this brutal attack? With the rough manners of journalists, this affair might go very far. He slept badly. When he read his reply in the paper next morning, it seemed to him more aggressive in print than in manuscript. He might, it seemed to him, have softened certain phrases. He felt feverish all day and slept badly again at night. He rose at dawn to get the number of the *Plume* that must contain a reply to him.

The weather had turned cold again; it was freezing hard. The gutters, frozen while still flowing, showed like two ribbons of ice alongside the pavement. The morning papers had not yet come in, and Duroy recalled the day of his first article, "Souvenirs d'un Chasseur d'Afrique." At length the newspapers were passed in at the window of the kiosk, and the woman vendor held out to Duroy an unfolded copy of the *Plume.*

He glanced through it in search of his name, and at first saw nothing. He was breathing again, when he saw between two dashes:

"Monsieur Duroy, of the *Vie Française,* contradicts us, and in contradicting us, lies. He admits, however, that there is a Madame Aubert, and that an agent took her before the commissary of police. It only remains, therefore, to add two words, *'des mœurs,'* after the word *'agent,'* and he is right. But the conscience of certain journalists is on a level with their talent. And I sign,

"LOUIS LANGREMONT."

George's heart began to beat violently, and he went home to dress without being too well aware of what he was doing.

He dressed quickly and went to see Monsieur Walter, although it was barely eight o'clock. Monsieur Walter, already up, was reading the *Plume.* "Well," said he, with a grave face, on seeing Duroy, "you cannot draw back now." The young fellow did not answer, and the other went on: "Go at once and see Rival, who will act for you."

Duroy stammered a few vague words, and went out in quest of the descriptive writer, who was still asleep. He jumped out of bed, and having read the paragraph, said: "By Jove! you will have to fight! Whom do you think of for the other second?"

"I really don't know."

"Boisrenard? What do you think of him?"

"Yes. Boisrenard."

"Are you a good swordsman?"

"Not at all."

"The devil! And with the pistol?"

"I can shoot a little."

"Good. You shall practice while I look after everything else. Wait for me a moment."

He went into his dressing-room and soon reappeared, washed, shaved, correct-looking.

"Come with me," said he.

He lived on the ground floor of a small house, and he led Duroy to the cellar, an enormous cellar, converted into a fencing room and shooting gallery, all the openings to the street being closed. After having lit a row of gas jets running the whole length of the second cellar, at the end of which was an iron man painted red and blue, he placed on a table two pairs of breech-loading pistols and began to give the word of command in a sharp tone as though on the ground: "Ready! Fire—one—two—three."

Duroy, dumbfounded, obeyed, raising his arm, aiming and firing, and as he often hit the mark fair on the body, having frequently made use of an old horse pistol of his father's when a boy against the birds, Jacques Rival, well satisfied, exclaimed: "Good—very good—very good—you will do—you will do."

Then he left George, saying: "Go on shooting till noon. Here is plenty of ammunition; don't be afraid to use it. I will come back to take you to lunch and tell you how things are going."

Left to himself, Duroy fired a few more shots and then sat down and began to reflect. How absurd these things were, all the same! What did a duel prove? Was a rascal less of a rascal after going out? What did an honest man who had been insulted gain by risking his life against a scoundrel? And his mind, gloomily inclined, recalled the words of Norbert de Varenne.

Then he felt thirsty, and, having heard the sound of water dropping behind him, found that there was a hydrant with a hose attached, and he drank from the nozzle of the hose. Then he began to think again. It was gloomy in this cellar, as gloomy as a tomb. The dull and distant rumbling of vehicles sounded like the rumblings of a far-off storm. What o'clock could it be? The hours passed by there as they must pass in prisons, without anything to indicate or mark them save the visits of the warden. He waited a long time. Then all at once he heard footsteps and voices, and Jacques Rival reappeared accompanied by Boisrenard. He called out as soon as he saw Duroy: "It's all settled."

The latter thinking the matter was settled by a letter of apology, his heart beat and he stammered, "Ah! thanks!"

The descriptive writer continued: "That fellow Langremont is very square; he accepted all our conditions. Twenty-five paces, one shot, raising the pistol at the word of command. The hand is much steadier that way than in bringing it down. See here, Boisrenard, this is what I mean."

And taking a pistol he fired, pointing out how much better one could aim by raising the arm. Then he said: "Now, let's go and lunch; it is past twelve o'clock."

They went to a neighboring restaurant. Duroy scarcely spoke. He ate in order not to appear afraid, and then, in course of the afternoon, accompanied Boisrenard to the office, where he got through his work mechanically and in a distracted fashion. They considered him game. Jacques Rival dropped in in the course of the afternoon, and it was settled that his seconds should call for him in a landau at seven o'clock the next morning and drive to the Bois du Vesinet, where the duel was to take place. All this had been done so unex-

pectedly, without his taking part in it, without his saying a word, without his giving his opinion, without his accepting or refusing, and with such rapidity, too, that he was bewildered, scared and scarcely able to understand what was going on.

He found himself at home at nine o'clock, after having dined with Boisrenard, who out of self-devotion had not left him all day. As soon as he was alone, he sat down and began to reflect. He had thrown upon his little table one of his adversary's cards, given him by Rival in order to retain his address. He read, as he had already done a score of times during the day, "Louis Langremont, 176 Rue Montmartre." Nothing more. He examined these assembled letters, which seemed to him mysterious and full of some disturbing import! Louis Langremont. Who was this man? What was his age, his height, his appearance? Was it not disgusting that a stranger, an unknown, should thus come and suddenly disturb one's existence without cause and from sheer caprice, on account of an old woman who had had a quarrel with her butcher? What a brute!

And he stood lost in thought, his eyes fixed on the card. Anger was aroused in him against this bit of paper, an anger with which was blended a strange sense of uneasiness. What a stupid business it was! He took a pair of nail scissors which were lying about and stuck their points into the printed name as though he were stabbing some one.

The sound of his own voice made him shudder, and he glanced about him. He began to feel very nervous. He drank a glass of water and went to bed.

As soon as he was in bed he blew out his candle and closed his eyes. He was warm between the sheets, though it was very cold in his room, but he could not manage to doze off.

A strange desire to get up and look at himself in the glass suddenly seized him. He relit his candle. When he saw his face so reflected, he scarcely recognized himself, and it seemed to him that he had never seen himself before. His eyes appeared enormous, and he was pale, yes, he was certainly pale, very pale. Suddenly the thought shot through his mind, "By this time tomorrow I may be dead." And his heart began to beat again furiously.

The thought occurred to him to make a fire. He built it up slowly without looking round. His hands shook slightly with a kind of nervous tremor when he touched anything. His head wandered, his disjointed, drifting thoughts became fleeting and painful, an intoxication invaded his mind as though he had been drinking. And he kept asking himself: "What shall I do? What will become of me?"

He began to walk up and down, repeating mechanically: "I must pull myself together, I must pull myself together." Then he added: "I will write to my parents in case of accident." He sat down again, did not dare write, and sprang up with a jump. From time to time his teeth absolutely chattered, and he asked himself: "Has my opponent been out before? Is he a frequenter of the shooting galleries? Is he known and classed as a shot?" He had never heard his name mentioned. And yet if this man had not been a remarkably good pistol shot, he would scarcely have accepted that dangerous weapon without discussion or hesitation.

Day was breaking, and he set about his toilet. He had another moment of weakness while shaving, in thinking that it was, perhaps, the last time he should shave his face. But he swallowed a mouthful of brandy and finished dressing. The hour which followed was difficult to get through. He paced up and down, trying to keep from thinking. When he heard a knock at the door he almost fell over backward, so startled was he. It was his seconds. Already!

They were wrapped up in furs, and Rival, after shaking his principal's hand, said: "It is as cold as Siberia." Then he added: "Well, how goes it?"

"Very well."

"You are quite steady?"

"Quite."

"That's all right. Have you had something to eat and drink?"

"Yes; I don't need anything."

Boisrenard, in honor of the occasion, sported the ribbon of a foreign order, yellow and green, that Duroy had never seen him display before.

They went downstairs. A gentleman was awaiting them in the carriage. Rival introduced him as "Dr. Le Brument." Duroy shook hands, saying: "I am very much obliged to you," and sought to take his place on the front seat. He sat down on something hard that made him jump up again, as though impelled by a spring. It was the pistol-case.

Rival observed: "No, the back seat for the doctor and the principal, the back seat."

Duroy ended by understanding him, and sank down beside the doctor. The two seconds got in in their turn, and the driver started. He knew where to go. But the pistol-case was in the way of every one, above all of Duroy, who would have preferred it out of sight. They tried to put it behind them, but it hurt their backs; they stuck it upright between Rival and Boisrenard, and it kept falling all the time. They finished by stowing it away under their feet. Conversation languished, although the doctor related some anecdotes. Rival alone replied to him. Duroy would have liked to say something witty, but he was afraid of losing the thread of his ideas, of showing the troubled state of his mind, and was haunted, too, by the fear that he might begin to tremble.

The carriage was soon right out in the country. It was about nine o'clock. It was one of those sharp winter mornings when everything is bright and brittle as glass. The trees, coated with hoar frost, seemed to have been sweating ice; the earth rang beneath one's steps, the dry air carried the slightest sound to a distance, the blue sky seemed to shine like a mirror, and the sun, dazzling and cold itself, shed upon the frozen universe rays which did not warm anything.

Rival observed to Duroy: "I got the pistols at Gastine Renet's. He loaded them himself. The box is sealed. We shall toss up, besides, to see whether we use them or those of our adversary."

Duroy mechanically replied: "I am very much obliged to you."

Then Rival gave him some special directions, for he was anxious that his principal should not make any mistake. He emphasized each point several times, saying: "When they say, 'Are you ready, gentlemen?' you must answer 'Yes' in a loud tone. When they give the word 'Fire!' you must raise your arm quickly, and you must fire before they say 'three.'"

And Duroy kept repeating to himself: "When they give the word to fire, I must raise my arm. When they give the word to fire, I must raise my arm." He learned it as children learn their lessons, by murmuring them to satiety in order to fix them on their minds. "When they give the word to fire, I must raise my arm."

The carriage entered a wood, turned down an avenue on the right, and then to the right again. Rival suddenly opened the door to cry to the driver: "That way, down that narrow road."

Duroy caught sight, at the farther side of the clearing, of another carriage drawn up, and four gentlemen stamping to keep their feet warm, and he was obliged to open his mouth, so difficult did his breathing become.

The seconds got out first and then the doctor and the principal. Rival had taken the pistol-case and had walked away with Boisrenard to meet two of the strangers who came toward them. Duroy watched them salute one another ceremoniously, and then walk up and down the clearing, looking now on the ground and now at the trees, as though they were looking for something that had fallen down or might fly away. Then they measured off a certain number of paces, and with great difficulty stuck two walking sticks into the frozen ground. Then they reassembled in a group and went through the action of tossing, like children playing heads or tails.

Dr. Le Brument said to Duroy: "Do you feel all right? Do you want anything?"

"No, nothing, thanks."

It seemed to him that he was mad, that he was asleep, that he was dreaming, that a supernatural influence enveloped him. Was he afraid? Perhaps. But he did not know. Everything about him had altered.

Jacques Rival returned and announced in low tones of satisfaction: "It is all ready. Luck has favored us as regards the pistols."

That, so far as Duroy was concerned, was a matter of profound indifference.

They took off his overcoat, which he let them do mechanically. They felt the breast pocket of his frock coat to make certain that he had no pocketbook or papers likely to deaden a ball. He kept repeating to himself like a prayer: "When the word is given to fire, I must raise my arm."

They led him up to one of the sticks stuck in the ground and handed him his pistol. Then he saw a man standing just in front of him—a short, stout, bald-headed man, wearing spectacles. It was his adversary. He saw him very plainly, but he could not think. "When the word to fire is given, I must raise my arm and fire at once."

A voice rang out in the deep silence, a voice that seemed to come from a great distance, saying: "Are you ready, gentlemen?"

George exclaimed: "Yes."

The same voice gave the word: "Fire!"

He heard nothing more, he saw nothing more, he took note of nothing more, he only knew that he raised his arm, pressing strongly on the trigger. And he heard nothing. But he saw all at once a little smoke at the end of his pistol barrel, and as the man in front of him still stood in the same position, he perceived, too, a little cloud of smoke drifting off over his head.

They had both fired. It was over.

His seconds and the doctor touched him, felt him and unbuttoned his clothes, asking anxiously: "Are you hit?"

He replied at haphazard: "No, I do not think so."

Langremont, too, was as unhurt as his enemy, and Jacques Rival murmured in a discontented tone: "It is always so with those damned pistols. You either miss or kill. What a filthy weapon!"

Duroy did not move, paralyzed by surprise and joy. It was over. They had to take away his pistol, which he still held clinched in his hand. It seemed to him now that he could have done battle with the whole world. It was over. What happiness! He felt suddenly brave enough to defy no matter whom.

All the seconds conversed together for a few moments, making an appointment to draw up their report of the proceedings in the course of the day. Then they got into the carriage again, and the driver, who was laughing on the box, started off, cracking his whip. They breakfasted together on the boulevards, and in chatting over the event, Duroy narrated his impressions.

"I felt quite unconcerned, quite. You must, however, have noticed it yourselves."

Rival replied: "Yes, you bore yourself very well."

When the report was drawn up it was handed to Duroy, who was to insert it in the paper. He was astonished to read that he had exchanged a couple of shots with Monsieur Louis Langremont, and rather uneasily interrogated Rival, saying: "But we only fired once."

The other smiled. "Yes, one shot apiece, that makes a couple of shots."

Duroy, deeming the explanation satisfactory, did not persist. Daddy Walter embraced him, saying: "Bravo, bravo! You have defended the colors of the *Vie Française*. Bravo!"

George showed himself in the course of the evening at the principal newspaper offices and at the chief cafés on the boulevards. He twice encountered his adversary, who was also showing himself. They did not bow to each other. If one of them had been wounded they would have shaken hands. Each of them, however, swore with conviction that he had heard the whistling of the other's bullet.

The next day, about eleven, Duroy received a telegram:

Awfully worried. Come at once. Rue de Constantinople.

CLO.

When he met her, he gave a dramatic account of the duel, which aroused her sympathy, and she murmured:

"Oh, my poor darling, my poor darling!"

Suddenly an idea came to him, and he asked: "What is the rent here?"

"A hundred francs a month."

"Well, I will take the rooms on my own account. Mine are no longer good enough for my new position."

After a few moments' reflection, she said:

"No, I do not wish it."

"Why not?" he asked in astonishment.

"Because."

It was agreed on, however, that he should take the rooms, and, as they parted, she said:

"Come and dine with us on Sunday. My husband thinks you are charming."

"What a strange being! What a feather-brain! How came that old man to marry that madcap!" thought Duroy as he made his way to the office.

CHAPTER VIII

DUROY PROPOSES

His duel had given Duroy a position among the leader writers of the *Vie Française*, but as he had great difficulty in finding ideas, he made a specialty of diatribes on the decadence of morality, the lowering of the standard of character, the weakening of the patriotic fibre and the anæmia of French honor. He had discovered the word anæmia, and was very proud of it. And when Madame de Marelle, filled with that sceptical, mocking and incredulous spirit characteristic of the Parisian, laughed at his tirades, which she demolished with an epigram, he replied with a smile:

"Bah! this sort of thing will give me a good reputation later on."

He now resided in the Rue de Constantinople, whither he had moved his portmanteau, his hairbrush, his razor and his soap, which was all his moving amounted to.

February was drawing to a close. There was an odor of violets in the street, as one passed the barrows of the flower sellers of a morning. Duroy was living beneath a sky without a cloud.

One night, on returning home, he found a letter that had been slipped under the door. He glanced at the postmark and read "Cannes." Having opened it, he read:

Villa Jolie, Cannes.

DEAR SIR AND FRIEND: You told me, did you not, that I could reckon upon you for anything? Well, I have a very painful service to ask of you; it is to come and help me, so that I may not be left alone in his last moments with Charles, who is dying. He may not last the week out, as the doctor forewarned me, although he has not taken to his bed. I have no longer strength nor courage to witness this hourly death, and I think with terror of those last moments which are drawing near. You are the only one of whom I can ask such a service, as my husband has no relatives. You were his comrade; he opened the door of the paper to you. Come, I beg of you; I have no one else to ask. Believe me your very sincere friend,

MADELEINE FORESTIER.

A strange feeling filled George's heart, a sense of freedom and of space opening before him, and he murmured: "To be sure I'll go. Poor Charles! What are we, after all?"

Monsieur Walter, to whom he read the letter, grumblingly granted permission, repeating: "But be back soon; you are indispensable to us."

George left for Cannes next day by

the seven o'clock express, after letting the Marelles know of his departure by telegram. He arrived the following evening about four o'clock. A commissionaire guided him to the Villa Jolie, built halfway up the slope of the pine forest clothed with white houses, which extends from Cannes to the Golfe Juan. The house—small, low and in the Italian style—was built beside the road which winds zigzag fashion up through the trees, revealing a succession of charming views at every turn.

The man servant opened the door and exclaimed: "Oh! sir, madame is expecting you most impatiently."

"How is your master?" inquired Duroy.

"Not at all well, sir. He cannot last much longer."

The drawing-room, into which George was shown, was hung with pink and blue chintz. The tall and wide windows overlooked the town and the sea. Duroy muttered: "By Jove! this is swell for a country house. Where the deuce do they get the money from?"

The rustle of a dress made him turn round. Madame Forestier held out both hands to him. "How good of you to come! How good of you to come!" said she.

She was somewhat paler and thinner, but still fresh-complexioned, and, perhaps, still prettier for her additional delicacy. She murmured: "He is dreadful, do you know; he knows that he is doomed, and he leads me a fearful life. But where is your portmanteau?"

"I have left it at the station, not knowing what hotel you would like me to stop at in order to be near you."

She hesitated a moment and then said: "You must stay here. Besides, your room is all ready. He might die at any moment, and if it were to happen during the night I should be alone. I will send for your baggage."

He bowed, saying: "As you please."

"Now, let us go upstairs," she said.

He followed her. She opened a door on the first floor, and Duroy saw, wrapped in rugs and seated in an armchair near the window, a kind of living corpse, livid even under the red light of the setting sun, and looking toward him. He scarcely recognized, but rather guessed, that it was his friend. The room reeked of fever, medicated drinks, ether, tar, the nameless and oppressive odor of a consumptive's sick room. Forestier held out his hand slowly and with difficulty. "So here you are. You have come to see me die, then! Thank you."

Duroy affected to laugh. "To see you die? That would not be a very amusing sight, and I should not select such an occasion to visit Cannes. I came to look in upon you and to rest myself a bit."

Forestier murmured: "Sit down," and then bent his head as though lost in painful thoughts. He breathed hurriedly and pantingly, and from time to time gave a kind of groan, as if he wanted to remind the others how ill he was.

Seeing that he would not speak, his wife came and leaned against the window sill, and indicating the view with a motion of her head, said: "Look! Is not that beautiful?"

The void beyond the dark hilltops was red, a glowing red that the eye would not bear, and Duroy, despite himself, felt the majesty of the close of the day. He murmured, finding no other term strong enough to express his

admiration: "It is stunning."

Forestier raised his head, and, turning to his wife, said: "Let me have some fresh air."

She opened the window quite wide. The air that entered surprised all three like a caress. It was a soft, warm breeze, a breeze of spring, already laden with the breath of the fragrant shrubs and flowers which grow on these coasts. A powerful odor of turpentine and the pungent smell of the eucalyptus could be distinguished.

Forestier drank it in with short and fevered gasps. He clutched the arms of the chair with his nails, and said in low, hissing and savage tones: "Shut the window. It hurts me. I would rather die in a cellar."

His wife slowly closed the window, and then looked out into space, her forehead against the pane. Duroy, feeling very ill at ease, would have liked to have chatted with the invalid and reassured him, but he could think of nothing to comfort him. At length he said:

"Then you have not improved since you have been here?"

Forestier shrugged his shoulders with low-spirited impatience. "You see very well I have not," he replied and again lowered his head.

Duroy went on: "By heavens! it is ever so much nicer here than in Paris. We are still in the middle of winter there. It snows, it freezes, it rains, and it is dark enough for the lamps to be lit at three in the afternoon."

"Anything new at the office?" asked Forestier.

"Nothing. They have taken on young Lacrin, who left the *Voltaire*, to do your work, but he is not up to it. It is time that you came back."

The invalid murmured: "I—I shall do all my work six feet under the sod now."

This idea recurred like a knell *àpropos* of everything, continually cropped up in every idea, every sentence.

Forestier began to speak in a broken, breathless voice, heartrending to listen to. "How many more sunsets shall I see? Eight, ten, fifteen or twenty, perhaps thirty—no more. You have time before you; for me it is all over. And it will go on all the same, after I am gone, as if I was still here." He was silent for a few moments and then continued: "All that I see reminds me that in a few days I shall see it no more. It is horrible." Duroy suddenly recalled what Norbert de Varenne had said to him some weeks before: "I now see death so near that I often want to stretch out my arms to push it back. I see it everywhere. The insects crushed on the path, the falling leaves, the white hair in a friend's head rend my heart and cry to me, 'Behold it!' "

He had not understood all this at the time; but did so now, on seeing Forestier. An unknown anguish seized him as if he himself were sensible of the presence of death, hideous death, hard by, within reach of his hand, on the chair in which his friend lay gasping.

He longed to get up, to go away, to fly, to return to Paris at once. Oh! if he had known he would not have come.

Darkness had now spread over the room, like premature mourning for this dying man. The window alone remained still visible, showing, within the lighter square formed by it, the motionless outline of the young wife.

Forestier remarked with irritation: "Well, are they going to bring in the lamp to-night? This is what they call looking after an invalid."

The shadow against the window panes disappeared and the sound of an electric bell rang through the house. A servant shortly entered and placed a lamp on the mantelpiece. Madame Forestier said to her husband: "Will you go to bed or would you rather come down to dinner?"

He murmured: "I will come down."

Waiting for this meal kept them all three sitting still for nearly an hour, only uttering from time to time some useless, commonplace remark, as if there were some danger, some mysterious danger, in letting silence endure too long, in letting the air congeal in this room where death was prowling.

At length dinner was announced. The meal seemed interminable to Duroy. They did not speak, but ate noiselessly and then crumbled their bread with their fingers.

As soon as dinner was over, Duroy, on the plea of fatigue, retired to his room and strove to find some reason to justify a swift departure, inventing plans, telegrams he was to receive, a recall from Monsieur Walter.

But his resolves to fly appeared more difficult to realize on awakening the next morning.

It was a bright day, one of those bright southern days that make the heart feel light, and Duroy walked down to the sea, thinking that it would be soon enough to see Forestier some time in course of the afternoon. When he returned to lunch, the servants remarked: "Master has already asked for you two or three times, sir. Will you please step up to his room, sir?"

He went upstairs. Forestier appeared to be dozing in his armchair. His wife was reading, stretched out on the sofa.

The invalid raised his head, and Duroy said: "Well, how do you feel? You seem quite fresh this morning."

"Yes, I am better. I have recovered some of my strength. Get through your lunch with Madeleine as soon as you can, for we are going for a drive."

As soon as she was alone with Duroy, the young wife said to him: "There, to-day he thinks he is all right again. He has been making plans all the morning. We are going to the Golfe Juan now to buy some pottery for our rooms in Paris. He is determined to go out, but I am horribly afraid of some mishap. He cannot bear the shaking of the drive."

When the landau arrived Forestier came downstairs a step at a time, supported by his servant. But as soon as he caught sight of the carriage, he ordered the hood to be put down. His wife opposed this, saying: "You will catch cold. It is madness."

He persisted, repeating: "Oh, I am much better. I feel it."

They passed at first along some of those shady roads, bordered by gardens, which make Cannes resemble a kind of English park, and then reached the highway to Antibes, running along the seashore.

The carriage stopped opposite á kind of large pavilion, on the front of which was the inscription, "Art Pottery of the Golfe Juan." Forestier wanted to buy a couple of vases for his study. As he felt unequal to getting out of the carriage, specimens were brought out to him one after the other. He was a long time

in making a choice, and consulted his wife and Duroy.

"You know," he said, "it is for the cabinet at the end of my study. Sitting in my chair, I have it before my eyes all the time. I want an antique form, a Greek outline." He examined the specimens, had others brought, and then turned again to the first ones. At length he made up his mind, and, having paid, insisted upon the articles being sent on at once. "I shall be going back to Paris in a few days," he said.

They drove home, but as they skirted the bay a rush of air, from one of the valleys, suddenly met them, and the invalid began to cough. It was nothing at first, but it grew worse and became an unbroken fit of coughing and then a kind of gasping hiccough.

Forestier was choking, and every time he tried to draw breath the cough seemed to tear his chest. Nothing would soothe or check it. He had to be borne from the carriage to his room, and Duroy, who supported his legs, felt the jerking of his feet at each spasm of his lungs. The warmth of the bed did not check the attack, which lasted till midnight, when, at length, it was lulled with narcotics. The sick man remained till morning sitting up in bed, with his eyes open.

The first words he uttered were to ask for the barber, for he insisted on being shaved every morning. He got up for this operation, but had to be helped back into bed at once, and his breathing grew so short, so hard and so difficult that Madame Forestier, in alarm, had Duroy, who had just turned in, roused up again in order to beg him to go for the doctor.

He came back almost immediately with Dr. Gavaut, who prescribed a soothing drink and gave some advice, but when the journalist saw him to the door, in order to ask his real opinion, he said: "It is the end. He will be dead to-morrow morning. Break it to his poor young wife and send for a priest. I, for my part, can do nothing more. I am, however, entirely at your service."

Duroy sent for Madame Forestier. "He is dying," said he. "The doctor advises a priest being sent for. What would you like done?"

She hesitated for some time, and then, in low tones, as though she had thought of everything, replied: "Yes, that will be best—in many respects. I will break it to him—tell him the vicar wants to see him, or something or other; I really don't know what. You would be very kind if you would go and find a priest for me and pick one out, one who won't raise too many difficulties over confession."

The young fellow returned with a complaisant old ecclesiastic, who accommodated himself to the state of affairs. As soon as he had gone into the dying man's room, Madame Forestier came out of it and sat down with Duroy in the one adjoining.

"It has quite upset him," said she. "When I spoke to him about a priest his face assumed a frightful expression as if he had felt the breath—the breath of—you know. He understood that it was all over at last and that his hours were numbered." She was very pale as she continued: "I shall never forget the expression of his face. He certainly saw death face to face at that moment. He saw him."

They could hear the priest, who

spoke in somewhat loud tones, being slightly deaf, and who was saying: "No, no; you are not so bad as all that. You are ill, but in no danger. And the proof is that I have called in as a friend, as a neighbor."

They could not make out Forestier's reply, but the old man went on: "No, I will not administer the sacrament. We will talk of that when you are better. If you wish to profit by my visit —to confess, for instance—I ask nothing better. I am a shepherd, you know, and seize every occasion to bring my lambs back to the fold."

A long silence followed. Forestier must have said something in a feeble tone. Then all at once the priest uttered in a different tone, the tone of one officiating at the altar: "The mercy of God is infinite. Repeat the *Confiteor*, my son. You have perhaps forgotten it; I will help you. Repeat after me: *'Confiteor Deo omnipotenti—Beatæ Mariæ semper virgini.'* "

He paused from time to time to allow the dying man to follow him. Then he said: "And now confess."

The young wife and Duroy sat still, filled with strange emotion, stirred by anxious expectation. The invalid had murmured something. The priest repeated: "You have given way to guilty pleasures—of what kind, my son?"

Madeleine rose and said: "Let us go into the garden. We must not listen to his secrets."

And they went out and sat on a bench before the door, beneath a rose tree in bloom, and beside a bed of pinks, which shed their sweet, strong fragrance abroad in the pure air. Duroy, after a few moments' silence, inquired: "Will you delay your return to Paris?"

"Oh, no," she replied. "As soon as it is all over I shall go back there."

The servant came to inform them that "M. le Curé had finished," and they went upstairs together.

Forestier seemed to have grown thinner since the previous day. The priest held out his hand to him, saying: "Good-day, my son; I will call in again to-morrow morning," and took his departure.

As soon as he had left the room the dying man, who was panting for breath, strove to hold out his two hands to his wife and gasped: "Save me—save me, darling. I don't want to die—I don't want to die. Oh! save me—tell me what I had better do; send for the doctor. I will take whatever you like. I won't die—I won't die."

He wept. Big tears streamed from his eyes down his fleshless cheeks, and the corners of his mouth contracted like those of a vexed child.

His wife, who began to cry, too, said: "No, no, it is nothing. It is only a passing attack; you will be better to-morrow; you tired yourself too much going out yesterday."

He kept repeating: "I don't want to die! Oh! God—God—God; what is to become of me? I shall no longer see anything—anything any more! The cemetery—I—— Oh! God!"

He said no more, but lay motionless, haggard and gasping.

Time sped on; noon struck by the clock of a neighboring convent. Duroy left the room to eat a mouthful or two. He came back an hour later. Madame Forestier refused to take anything. The invalid had not stirred. He still continued to draw his thin fingers along the sheet as though to pull it up over

his face.

His wife was seated in an armchair at the foot of the bed. Duroy took another beside her, and they waited in silence. A nurse had come, sent by the doctor, and was dozing near the window.

Duroy himself was beginning to doze off when he felt that something was taking place. He opened his eyes just in time to see Forestier close his, like two lights suddenly extinguished. A faint rattle stirred in the throat of the dying man, and two streaks of blood appeared at the corners of his mouth and then flowed down into his shirt. His hands ceased their hideous motion. He had ceased to breathe.

His wife understood this, and, uttering a kind of shriek, she fell on her knees, sobbing, with her face buried in the bedclothes. George, surprised and terrified, mechanically made the sign of the cross. The nurse, having awoke, drew near the bed. "It is all over," said she.

Duroy, who was recovering his self-possession, murmured with a sigh of relief: "It was over sooner than I expected."

When the first shock was over and the first tears shed, they had to busy themselves with the necessary care for the dead. Duroy was running errands till nightfall. He was very hungry when he got back. Madame Forestier ate a little, and then they both sat down in the chamber of death to watch beside the body. Two candles burned on the night table beside a plate filled with holy water, in which lay a sprig of mimosa, for they had not been able to get the required twig of consecrated box.

They were alone, the young man and the young wife, beside him who was no more. They sat, without speaking, thinking and watching.

An enormous, confused and crushing sense of terror weighed down the soul of Duroy, the terror of that boundless and inevitable annihilation that destroys our wretched, fleeting lives. He already bowed his head before its menace. He thought of the flies who live a few hours, the beasts who live a few days, the men who live a few years, the worlds which live a few centuries. What was the difference between one and the other? A few more dawns, that was all.

He turned away his eyes that he might no longer see the corpse. Madame Forestier, with bent head, seemed also absorbed in painful thoughts. Her fair hair was so pretty around her pale face that a feeling, sweet as the touch of hope, flitted through the young fellow's breast. Why grieve, when he had still so many years before him? And he began to observe her. Lost in thought she did not notice him. He said to himself:

What luck the dead man had to meet such an intelligent and charming companion! How had they become acquainted? However had she agreed on her part to marry that poor, commonplace young fellow? How had she succeeded in making something of him? He remembered what had been whispered about the Comte de Vaudrec, who had dowered and married her off, it was said.

What would she do now? Whom would she marry? A deputy, as Madame de Marelle fancied, or some young fellow with a future before him, a higher class Forestier? Had she any projects, any plans, any settled ideas? How he

would have liked to know that. But why this anxiety as to what she would do? He asked himself this, and perceived that his uneasiness was due to one of those half-formed and secret ideas which one hides even from one's self, and only discovers when fathoming one's self to the very bottom.

Yes, why should he not attempt this conquest himself? How strong and redoubtable he would be with her beside him!

An impatient desire to know this, to question her, to learn her intentions, took possession of him. He would have to leave on the next day but one, as he could not remain alone with her in the house. So it was necessary to be quick; it was necessary before returning to Paris to become acquainted, cleverly and delicately, with her projects, and not to allow her to retract, to yield, perhaps, to the solicitations of another, and pledge herself irrevocably.

He did not know how to give her to understand that he would be happy, very happy, to have her for his wife in his turn. Certainly he could not tell her so at that hour, in that place, before that corpse.

"Cannot we open the window a little?" said Duroy. "It seems to me that the air is tainted."

"Yes," she replied, "I have just noticed it, too."

He went to the window and opened it, and turning round, said: "Come and get a little fresh air. It is delightful."

She came quietly and leaned on the window sill beside him. Then he murmured in a low tone: "Listen to me and try to understand what I want to tell you. Above all, do not be indignant at my speaking to you of such a matter at such a moment, for I shall leave you the day after to-morrow, and when you return to Paris it may be too late. I am only a poor devil without fortune, and with a position yet to make, as you know. But I have a firm will, some brains, I believe, and I am well on the right track. In short, I told you one day at your house that my brightest dream would have been to have married a woman like you. I repeat this wish to you now. Do not answer, let me continue. It is not a proposal I am making to you. The time and the place would render that odious. I wish only not to leave you ignorant that you can make me happy with a word, that you can make of me either a friend and brother or a husband at your will; that my heart and myself are yours. I do not want you to answer me now. I do not want us to speak any more about the matter here. When we meet again in Paris you will let me know what you have resolved upon. Until then, not a word. Is it not so?"

He had uttered all this without looking at her, as though scattering his words abroad in the night before him. She seemed not to have heard them, so motionless had she remained, looking also straight before her with a fixed and vague stare at the vast landscape lit up by the moon. They remained for some time side by side, elbow touching elbow, silent and reflecting. Then she murmured: "It is rather cold," and turning around, returned to her chair.

Toward midnight Duroy dozed off first. When he awoke he saw that Madame Forestier was also slumbering, and, having shifted to a more comfortable position, he reclosed his eyes growling: "Confound it all, it is more

comfortable between sheets, all the same."

A sudden noise made him start up. The nurse was entering the room. It was broad daylight. The young wife in the armchair in front of him seemed as surprised as himself. She was somewhat pale, but still pretty, fresh-looking and attractive, in spite of this night passed in a chair.

Madame Forestier suggested a stroll in the garden to Duroy, and they began to walk slowly round the little lawn, inhaling with pleasure the balmy air, laden with the scent of pine and eucalyptus. Suddenly she began to speak, without turning her head toward him, as he had done during the night upstairs. She uttered her words slowly in a low and serious voice:

"Look here, my dear friend, I have deeply reflected, already, on what you proposed to me, and I do not want you to go away without an answer. Besides, I am going to say neither yes nor no. It is necessary, after what you have said to me, that you should thoroughly understand what sort of a woman I am, in order that you may no longer cherish the wish you expressed to me, in case you are not of a—of a—disposition to comprehend and bear with me. Understand me well. Marriage for me is not a chain but a partnership. I mean to be free, perfectly free, as to my ways, my acts, my going and coming. I could neither tolerate supervision, nor jealousy, nor discussion of my behavior. I should undertake, be it understood, never to compromise the name of the man who takes me as his wife, never to render him hateful and ridiculous. But this man must also undertake to see in me an equal, an ally, and not an inferior or an obedient and submissive wife. My notions, I know, are not those of every one, but I shall not change them. There you are. I will also add, do not answer me; it would be useless and unsuitable. We shall see each other again, and shall perhaps speak of all this again later on. Now, go for a stroll. I shall return to watch beside him. I shall see you this evening."

He printed a long kiss on her hand and went away without uttering a word. That evening they only saw each other at dinner time. Then they retired to their rooms, both exhausted with fatigue.

Charles Forestier was buried the next day, without any funeral display, in the cemetery at Cannes. George Duroy wished to take the Paris express, which passed through the town at half-past one.

Madame Forestier drove with him to the station. They walked quietly up and down the platform pending the time for his departure, speaking of trivial matters.

The train rolled into the station. The journalist took his seat and then got out again to have a few more moments' conversation with her, suddenly seized as he was with sadness and a strong regret at leaving her, as though he were about to lose her forever.

A porter shouted: "Take your seats for Marseilles, Lyons and Paris." Duroy got in and leaned out of the window to say a few words. The engine whistled and the train began to move slowly on.

The young fellow, leaning out of the carriage, watched the woman standing still on the platform, and following him with her eyes. Suddenly, as he was

about to lose sight of her, he put his hand to his mouth and threw a kiss toward her. She returned it with a discreet and hesitating gesture.

CHAPTER IX

A WEDDING

Durov returned to all his old habits.

Installed at present in the little ground-floor suite of rooms in the Rue de Constantinople, he lived soberly, like a man preparing a new existence for himself. His relations with Madame de Marelle had even assumed a conjugal aspect, as if he were practicing in advance for the coming event, and his mistress, often annoyed at the calm regularity of their union, repeated with a laugh: "You are still more domesticated than my husband; it was not worth while changing."

Madame Forestier had not yet returned. She was lingering at Cannes. He received a letter from her merely announcing her return about the middle of April, without a word of allusion to the farewell. He was waiting. His mind was thoroughly made up now to employ every means in order to marry her, if she seemed to hesitate. But he had faith in his luck, confidence in that power of seduction which he felt within him, a vague and irresistible power of which all women felt the influence.

A short note informed him that the decisive hour was at hand.

I am in Paris. Come and see me.
Madeleine Forestier.

Nothing more. He received it by the nine o'clock mail. He was at her residence at three on the same day. She held out both her hands to him, smiling with her pleasant smile, and they looked into each other's eyes for a few seconds. Then she said: "How good you were to come to me there under those terrible circumstances."

"I should have done anything you told me," he replied.

And they sat down. She asked the news, inquired about the Walters, about all the staff, about the paper. She had often thought about the paper.

"I miss it very much," she said, "really very much. I had become at heart a journalist. I cannot help it, I love the profession."

Then she paused. He thought he understood, he thought he divined in her smile, in the tone of her voice, in her words themselves a kind of invitation, and, although he had promised to himself not to precipitate matters, he stammered out: "Well then, why—why—why should you not resume—this occupation—under—under the name of Duroy?"

She suddenly became serious again, and, placing her hand on his arm, murmured: "Do not let us speak of that yet a while."

But he divined that she accepted, and, falling at her knees, began to passionately kiss her hands, repeating:

"Thanks, thanks; oh! how I love you."

"Listen," she said in a serious tone, "I have not yet made up my mind to anything. However, it may be—yes. But you must promise me the most absolute secrecy until I give you leave to speak."

He swore this and left, his heart overflowing with joy.

He was from that time on very discreet as regards the visits he paid her, and did not ask for any more definite consent on her part, for she had a way of speaking of the future, of saying "by and by," and of shaping plans in which these two lives were blended which answered him better and more delicately than a formal acceptance.

Duroy worked hard and spent little, trying to save money so as not to be without a penny at the date fixed for his marriage and becoming as close as he had been prodigal. The summer went by, and then the autumn, without any one suspecting anything, for they met very little and only in the most natural way in the world.

One evening Madeleine, looking him straight in the eyes, said: "You have not yet announced our intentions to Madame de Marelle?"

"No, dear. Having promised you to be secret, I have not opened my mouth to a living soul."

"Well, it is about time to tell her. I will undertake to inform the Walters. You will do so this week, will you not?"

He blushed as he said: "Yes, to-morrow."

She had turned away her eyes in order not to notice his confusion and said: "If you like, we will be married in the beginning of May. That will be a very good time."

"I obey you in all things joyfully."

"I had thought about one matter," she continued, "but it is rather difficult to explain."

"What is it?" he asked.

"Well, it is this, my dear boy. I am like all women. I have my weaknesses, my pettinesses. I love all that glitters, that catches the ear. I should have so delighted to have borne a noble name. Could you not, on the occasion of our marriage, ennoble yourself a little?"

She had blushed in her turn, as if she had proposed something indelicate.

He replied simply enough: "I have often thought about it, but it did not seem to be so easy."

"Your native place is Canteleu?" she queried.

"Yes."

She hesitated, saying: "No, I do not like the termination. Come, cannot we modify this word Canteleu a little?"

She had taken up a pen from the table and was scribbling names and studying their physiognomy. All at once she exclaimed: "There! there it is!" and held out to him a paper, on which he read: "Madame Duroy de Cantel."

He reflected a few moments and then said gravely: "Yes, that does very well."

She was delighted and kept repeating: "Duroy de Cantel, Duroy de Cantel, Madame Duroy de Cantel. It is capital, capital." She went on with an air of conviction: "And you will see how easy it is to get every one to accept it. But one must know how to seize the opportunity, for it will be too late afterward. You must from to-morrow sign your descriptive articles D. de Cantel and your 'Echoes' simply Duroy. It is done every day in the press, and no one will be astonished to

see you take a pseudonym. At the moment of our marriage we can modify it a little more and tell our friends that you had given up the 'du' out of modesty on account of your position, or even say nothing about it. What is your father's Christian name?"

"Alexander."

She murmured: "Alexander, Alexander," two or three times, listening to the sonorous roll of the syllables, and then wrote on a blank sheet of paper:

"Monsieur and Madame Alexander du Roy de Cantel have the honor to inform you of the marriage of Monsieur George du Roy de Cantel, their son, to Madame Madeleine Forestier."

She looked at her writing, holding it at a distance, charmed by the effect, and said: "With a little method we can manage whatever we wish."

When he found himself once more in the street, firmly resolved to call himself in future Du Roy, and even Du Roy de Cantel, it seemed to him that he had acquired fresh importance. He walked with more swagger, his head higher, his mustache fiercer, as a gentleman should walk. He felt in himself a species of joyous desire to say to the passers-by: "My name is Du Roy de Cantel."

He received a telegram from Madame de Marelle next morning saying that she would call at one o'clock. He waited for her somewhat feverishly, his mind made up to bring things to a point at once, to say everything right out, and then, when the first emotion had subsided, to argue cleverly in order to prove to her that he could not remain a bachelor forever, and that as Monsieur de Marelle insisted on living, he had been obliged to think of another than herself as a life companion. He felt moved, though, and when he heard her ring, his heart began to beat.

She entered the room, exclaiming: "Good-morning, Bel-Ami." Then finding his manner cold, she looked at him and said: "What is the matter with you?"

"Sit down," said he; "we have to talk seriously."

She sat down without taking her hat off, only turning back her veil, and waited.

He had lowered his eyes, and was preparing the beginning of his speech. He commenced in a low tone of voice: "My dear one, you see me very uneasy, very sad and very much embarrassed at what I have to admit to you. I really love you from the bottom of my heart, so that the fear of causing you pain afflicts me more than even the news I am going to tell you."

She grew pale, felt herself tremble and stammered out: "What is the matter? Tell me at once."

He said in sad but resolute tones, with that feigned sorrow which we make use of to announce fortunate misfortunes: "I am going to be married."

She gave a sigh as of a woman about to faint, a painful sigh from the very depths of her bosom, and then began to choke and gasp without being able to speak.

He knelt down before her, without daring to touch her, however, and, more deeply moved by this silence than he would have been by a fit of anger, stammered out: "Clo! my darling Clo! just consider my situation, consider what I am. Oh, if I had been able to marry you, what happiness it would have been. But you are married. What could I do?

Come, think of it now. I must take a place in society, and I cannot do it so long as I have not a home. If you only knew. There are days when I have felt a longing to kill your husband."

He spoke in his soft, subdued, seductive voice, a voice which fell on the ear like music. He saw two tears slowly gather in the fixed and staring eyes of his mistress and then roll down her cheeks, while two more were ready to fall.

He murmured: "Do not cry, Clo; do not cry, I beg of you. You wring my heart."

Then she made an effort, a strong effort, to be proud and dignified, and asked, in the quivering tone of a woman about to burst into sobs: "Who is it?"

He hesitated a moment, and then, understanding that it was necessary, said: "Madeleine Forestier."

She rose. Duroy guessed that she was going away without saying a word, without reproach or forgiveness, and he felt hurt and humiliated to the bottom of his soul. Wishing to stay her, he threw his arms about her, saying: "I beg of you, do not go away like that."

Then she looked down on him from above with that moistened and despairing eye, at once so charming and so sad, which shows all the grief of a woman's heart, and gasped out: "I—I have nothing to say. I can do nothing. You—you are right. You—you have chosen well."

And, freeing herself by a backward movement, she left the room without his trying to detain her further.

Left to himself, he rose as bewildered as if he had received a blow on the head. Then, making up his mind, he muttered: "Well, it is all for the worse or the better. It is over, and without a scene. It is just as well." And relieved from an immense weight, suddenly feeling himself free, delivered, at ease as to his future life, he began to spar at the wall, hitting out with his fists in a kind of intoxication of strength and triumph as if he had been fighting Fate.

When Madame Forestier asked, "Have you told Madame de Marelle?" he quietly answered: "Yes."

She scanned him closely with her bright eyes, saying: "And did it not cause her any emotion?"

"No, not at all. She thought it, on the contrary, a very good idea."

The news was soon known. Some were astonished, others asserted that they had foreseen it; others, again, smiled, and let it be understood that they were not surprised.

The young man, who now signed his descriptive articles D. de Cantel, his "Echoes" Duroy and the political articles which he was beginning to write from time to time Du Roy, passed half his time with his betrothed. She had decided that the marriage should be quite private, only the witnesses being present, and that they should leave the same evening for Rouen. They would go the next day to see the journalist's parents and remain with them some days. Duroy had striven to get her to renounce this project, but not having been able to do so, had ended by giving in to it.

So the 10th of May having come, the newly married couple, having considered the religious ceremony useless since they had not invited any one, returned to finish packing their boxes after the brief civil ceremony at the

Town Hall. They took the six o'clock train, which bore them away toward Normandy. They had scarcely exchanged twenty words up to the time they found themselves alone in the railway carriage. As soon as they were on their way they looked at each other and began to laugh, to hide a certain feeling of awkwardness which they did not want to manifest.

The train slowly passed through the long station of Batignolles and then crossed the mangy-looking plain extending from the fortifications to the Seine. When they crossed the bridge of Asnières, they were amused at the sight of the river covered with boats, fishermen and oarsmen.

Duroy murmured: "I adore the suburbs of Paris. I have memories of dinners which I reckon among the pleasantest in my life."

"And the boats," she replied. "How nice it is to glide along at sunset."

Then they became silent, as though afraid to continue these outpourings as to their past life, and remained so, already enjoying, perhaps, the poetry of regret.

Duroy, seated face to face with his wife, took her hand and slowly kissed it, and kept pressing it gently, without her making any response to this appeal. At length he said: "It seems to me very funny that you should be my wife."

She seemed surprised as she said: "Why so?"

"I do not know. It seems strange to me. I want to kiss you, and I feel astonished at having the right to do so."

She calmly held out her cheek to him, which he kissed as he would have kissed that of a sister.

He continued: "The first time I saw you—you remember the dinner Forestier invited me to—I thought: 'Hang it all, if I could only find a wife like that.' Well, it's done. I have one."

She said in a low tone: "That is very nice," and looked him straight in the face shrewdly and with smiling eyes.

He reflected: "I am too cold. I am too stupid. I ought to get along faster than this," and clasping her to him, kissed her with eager and quivering lips. She freed herself, and quickly rising to her feet, said: "Come, George; do leave off. We are not children; we can very well wait till we get to Rouen."

He remained seated, very red and chilled by this sensible remark. Then, having recovered more self-possession, he said with some liveliness: "Very well, I will wait; but I shan't be able to say a dozen words till we get there. And remember that we are only passing through Poissy."

"I will do the talking then," she said, and sat down quietly beside him.

She spoke with precision of what they would do on their return. They must keep on the suite of apartments that she had resided in with her first husband, and Duroy would also inherit the duties and salaries of Forestier at the *Vie Française*. Before their marriage, besides, she had planned with the assurance of a man of business all the financial details of their household. They had married under a contract preserving to each of them their respective estates, and every incident that might arise—death, divorce and the birth of one or more children—was duly provided for. The young fellow contributed a capital of four thousand

francs, he said, but of this sum he had borrowed fifteen hundred. The rest was what he had saved during the year, in view of the event. Her contribution was forty thousand francs, which she said had been left her by Forestier.

She turned to him as a subject of conversation. "He was a very steady, economical, hard-working fellow. He would have made a fortune in a very short time."

Duroy no longer listened, wholly absorbed by other thoughts. She stopped from time to time, to follow out some inward train of ideas, and then went on: "In three or four years you can be easily earning thirty or forty thousand francs a year. That is what Charles would have had if he had lived."

George, who had begun to find the lecture rather a long one, replied: "I thought we were not going to Rouen to talk about him," referring to a remark she had made.

She gave him a slight tap on the cheek, saying, with a laugh: "That is so. I am in the wrong."

He placed his hands on his knees, pretending to be a very good boy.

"You look like a simpleton like that," said she.

He replied in the tone of a schoolboy stumbling through his lesson: "Yes, I do. I expect you to give me thorough instruction—in twenty lessons. Ten for the elements, reading and grammar; ten for accomplishments and rhetoric. I don't know anything myself."

She exclaimed, highly amused:

"My dear little pupil, trust my experience, my great experience. Kisses in a railway train are not worth anything. They only upset one." Then she blushed still more as she murmured: "One should never cut wheat while it is green."

He chuckled, kindling at the double meanings from her pretty mouth and made the sign of the cross, with a movement of the lips as though murmuring a prayer, adding aloud: "I have placed myself under the protection of St. Anthony, patron saint of temptations. Now I am adamant."

Night was stealing gently on, folding in its transparent shadow, like fine gauze, the broad landscape stretching away to the right. This evening gloom, entering the open window, penetrated the souls of the now silent pair.

The whistle of the train announced that they were nearing a station. She remarked, flattening the ruffled locks about her forehead with the tips of her fingers: "It was very silly. We are quite childish."

But he was kissing her hands in turn with feverish rapidity and replied: "I adore you, my little Madeleine."

Until they reached Rouen they remained almost motionless, cheek against cheek, their eyes turned to the window, through which, from time to time, the lights of the houses could be seen in the darkness, satisfied with feeling themselves so close to each other.

They put up at a hotel overlooking the quay.

Next morning, as it was striking eight, Duroy looked at his wife, then suddenly, with the joyful impulse of the fortunate man who has just found a treasure, he clasped her in his arms, exclaiming: "My little Madeleine, I am sure that I love you ever so much, ever so much."

She smiled with her confident and satisfied smile and murmured, as she

returned his kisses: "And I, too—perhaps."

But he felt uneasy about the visit to his parent. He had already forewarned his wife, had prepared and lectured her, but he thought fit to do so again.

"You know," he said, "they are only rustics—country rustics, not theatrical ones."

She laughed. "I know that; you have told me so often enough. Come, get up and let me get up."

He jumped out of bed and said, as he drew on his socks: "We shall be very uncomfortable there, very uncomfortable. There is only an old bed with a straw mattress in my room. Spring mattresses are unknown at Canteleu."

She had put on her dressing gown—a white flannel dressing gown—which Duroy at once recognized. The sight of it was unpleasant to him. Why? His wife had, he was aware, a round dozen of these morning garments. She could not destroy them in order to buy a new one. No matter, he would have preferred that they were not the same she had worn with the other. It seemed to him that the soft, warm material must have retained something from its contact with Forestier.

They started an hour later, for they were to lunch with the old people, who had been notified some days previous. A rusty, open carriage bore them along with a noise of jolting hardware through a long and rather ugly boulevard, passed between some fields through which flowed a stream and began to ascend the slope. Madeleine, somewhat fatigued, had dozed off beneath the penetrating caress of the sun, which warmed her delightfully as she lay stretched back in the old carriage, as though in a bath of light and country air.

Her husband awoke her, saying: "Look!"

They had halted two-thirds of the way up the slope, at a spot famous for its view, to which all tourists drive. They overlooked the long and broad valley through which the bright river flowed in sweeping curves.

The driver waited until the travellers' ecstasies were over. He knew from experience the duration of the admiration of all the breeds of tourists. But when he started again, Duroy suddenly caught sight of two old people advancing toward them some hundreds of yards farther on, and jumped out, exclaiming: "There they are. I recognize them."

They were walking quickly and in silence to meet their long-looked-for boy, without noticing these city folk, followed by their carriage. They passed by, when George, who was laughing, cried out: "Good-day, Daddy Duroy!"

They both stopped short, amazed at first, then stupefied with surprise. The old woman recovered herself first and stammered, without advancing a step: "Is't thou, boy?"

The young fellow answered: "Yes, it is I, mother," and stepping up to her, kissed her on both cheeks with a son's hearty kiss. Then he rubbed his face against his father's, by way of greeting. Old Duroy had taken off his cap, a very high black silk cap, made Rouen-fashion, like those worn by cattle dealers.

Then George said: "This is my wife," and the two country people looked at Madeleine. They looked at her as one looks at a phenomenon, with an uneasy fear, blended with a species of

approving satisfaction in the father and in the mother with a kind of jealous enmity.

The man, who was of a joyous nature and inspired by a liveliness born of sweet cider and alcohol, grew bolder, and asked, with a twinkle in the corner of his eyes: "May I kiss her, all the same?"

"Certainly," replied his son; and Madeleine, ill at ease, held out both cheeks to the sounding smacks of the rustic, who then wiped his lips with the back of his hand. The old woman, in her turn, kissed her daughter-in-law with a hostile reservation. No, this was not the daughter-in-law of her dreams; the plump, fresh housewife, rosy-cheeked as an apple and round as a brood mare; but not this fine lady, with her furbelows and her musk. For to the old girl all perfumes were musk.

They set out again, walking behind the carriage which bore the trunk of the newly wedded pair. The old fellow took his son by the arm, and keeping him a little in the rear of the others, asked with interest:

"Well, how goes business, lad?"

"Pretty fair."

"So much the better. Has thy wife any money?"

"Forty thousand francs," answered George.

His father gave vent to an admiring whistle, and could only murmur: "Dang it!" so overcome was he by the mention of the sum. Then he added in a tone of serious conviction: "Dang it all, she's a fine woman!" For he found her to his taste, and he had passed for a good judge in his day.

Madeleine and her mother-in-law were walking side by side, without exchanging a word. The two men rejoined them. They reached Father Duroy's tavern, "The Bellevue," a bit of a house consisting of a ground floor and a garret, which stood at the beginning of the village to the left. A pine branch above the door indicated, in ancient fashion, that thirsty folk could enter.

The things were laid for lunch, in the common room of the tavern, on two tables placed together and covered with two napkins. A neighbor, come in to help serve lunch, bowed on seeing a fine lady appear, and then, recognizing George, exclaimed: "Good Lord! is that you, youngster?"

He replied gaily: "Yes, it is I, Mother Brulin," and kissed her as he had kissed his father and mother. Then turning to his wife, he said: "Come into our room and take your hat off."

They were ushered through a door to the right, into an unheated room with tiled floor, whitewashed walls and a bed with white cotton curtains. A crucifix above a cup of holy water and two colored pictures, one representing Paul and Virginia under a blue palm tree and the other Napoleon the First on a yellow horse, were the only ornaments of this clean and dispiriting apartment.

As soon as they were alone, he kissed Madeleine, saying: "I am glad to see the old folks again. When one is in Paris one does not think about it, but when one meets again, it gives one pleasure, all the same."

But his father, thumping the partition with his fist, cried out: "Come along, come along; the soup is ready," and they had to sit down to table.

It was a long country repast, with a succession of ill-assorted dishes, a sau-

sage after a leg of mutton and an omelet after the sausage. Father Duroy, excited by cider and some glasses of wine, turned on the tap of his choicest jokes—those he reserved for great occasions of festivity—smutty adventures that had happened, as he maintained, to friends of his.

Mother Duroy did not speak, but remained sad and glum, watching her daughter-in-law out of the corner of her eye, with hatred awakened in her heart—the hatred of an old toiler, an old rustic with fingers worn and limbs bent by hard work—for this lady, who inspired her with the repulsion of an accursed creature, an impure being, created for idleness and sin.

Madeleine scarcely ate or spoke, but looked sad, though she had the usual mournful, resigned smile. She was downcast. Why? She had wanted to come. She had not been unaware that she was going among country folk—poor country folk. What had she dreamed they would be like, she who did not usually dream? Did she know herself? Do not women always hope for something that is not? Had she fancied them more poetical? No, but perhaps better informed, more noble, more affectionate, more ornamental. She recalled her own mother, of whom she never spoke to any one—a governess, brought up at Saint-Denis, and dead from poverty and grief when she, Madeleine, was twelve years old. An unknown hand had had her brought up. Her father, no doubt. Who was he? She did not exactly know, although she had vague suspicions.

The lunch still dragged on. Customers were now coming in and shaking hands with old Duroy, uttering exclamations of wonder on seeing his son and slyly winking as they scanned the young wife out of the corner of their eye, which was as much as to say: "Hang it, she's no fool, George Duroy's wife." Others, less intimate, sat down at the wooden tables, calling for "A pot," "A jugful," "Two brandies," "A camphor julep," and began to play at dominoes, noisily rattling the little bits of black and white bone.

Mother Duroy kept passing to and fro, serving the customers with her melancholy air, taking money and wiping the tables with the corner of her blue apron.

As soon as dinner was over, Madeleine drew her husband out of the house, in order not to stay in this gloomy room, always reeking with the rank smell of pipes and spilt liquor. As soon as they were outside, he said: "You are tired of it already."

She began to protest, but he stopped her, saying: "No, I saw it very plainly. If you like, we will leave to-morrow."

"Very well," she murmured.

They strolled gently onward. They had entered a narrow path, overshadowed by tall trees and running between two lines of shrubbery of impenetrable blackness.

"Where are we?" asked she.

"In the forest," he replied.

"It is a large one?"

"Very large; one of the largest in France."

An odor of earth, trees and moss—that fresh yet old scent of the woods, made up of the sap of bursting buds and the dead and mouldering foliage of the thicket—seemed to linger in the path. Raising her head, Madeleine could see the stars through the tree tops, and although no breeze stirred the boughs,

she could yet feel around her the vague quivering of this ocean of leaves. A strange thrill shot through her soul and fleeted across her skin—a strange pain gripped her at the heart. Why? She did not understand. But it seemed to her that she was lost, engulfed, surrounded by perils, abandoned by every one, alone; alone in the world, beneath this living vault quivering there above her.

She murmured: "I am rather frightened. I should like to go back."

"Well, let us do so."

"And—we will leave for Paris to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow."

She slept badly, continually aroused by all the country sounds so new to her—the cry of the screech owl, the grunting of a pig in a sty adjoining the house and the noise of a cock who kept on crowing from midnight. She was up and ready to start at daybreak.

When George announced to his parents that he was going back, they were both astonished; then they understood the origin of this wish.

The father merely said: "Shall I see you again soon?"

"Yes, in course of the summer."

The old woman growled: "I hope you won't regret what you have done."

He left them two hundred francs as a present to soothe their feelings, and the carriage, which a boy had been sent in quest of, having made its appearance at about ten o'clock, the newly married couple embraced the old country folk and started off once more.

"Well, that's good."

As they were descending the hill, Duroy began to laugh.

"There," he said, "I had warned you. I ought not to have introduced you to Monsieur and Madame Du Roy de Cantel, Senior."

She began to laugh, too, and replied: "I am delighted now. They are good folk, whom I am beginning to like very well. I will send them some presents from Paris." Then she murmured: "Du Roy de Cantel, you will see that no one will be astonished at the terms of the notification of our marriage. We will say that we have been staying for a week with your parents on their estate." And bending toward him, she kissed the tip of his mustache, saying: "Good-morning, Georgey."

He replied: "Good-morning, Maisie," as he passed an arm round her waist.

In the valley below they could see the broad river like a ribbon of silver unrolled beneath the morning sun, the factory chimneys belching forth their clouds of smoke into the sky, and the pointed spires rising above the old town.

CHAPTER X

SUSPICION

THE Duroys had been back in Paris a couple of days, and the journalist had taken up his old work, pending the moment when he should definitely assume Forestier's duties, and give himself wholly up to politics. He was going home that evening to his predecessor's abode to dinner, with a light heart and a desire to embrace his wife. Passing by a florist's at the end of the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette, he was struck with the notion of buying a bouquet for Madeleine, and chose a large bunch of half-opened roses, a very mass of perfumed buds.

At each story of his new staircase he eyed himself complacently in the mirror, the sight of which continually recalled to him his first visit to the house.

He rang the bell, having forgotten his key, and the same man servant, whom he had also kept on by his wife's advice, opened the door.

"Has your mistress come home?" asked George.

"Yes, sir."

But on passing through the dining-room he was greatly surprised to find the table laid for three, and the hangings of the drawing-room door being looped up, he saw Madeleine arranging in a vase on the mantel a bunch of roses exactly similar to his own. He was annoyed, displeased; it was as though he had been robbed of his idea, his little attention, and all the pleasure he anticipated from it.

"You have invited some one to dinner, then?" he inquired as he entered the room.

She answered without turning around and continuing to arrange the flowers: "Yes and no. It is my old friend, Comte de Vaudrec, who has been accustomed to dine here every Monday, and who has come as usual."

George murmured: "Ah! very good."

He remained standing behind her, bouquet in hand, with a longing to hide it or throw it away. He said, however, "I have brought you some roses."

She turned round suddenly, smiling, and exclaiming:

"Ah! how nice of you to have thought of that."

And she held out her arms and lips to him with an outburst of joy so real that he felt consoled. She took the flowers, smelled them, and with the vivacity of a delighted child placed them in the empty vase opposite the other. Then she murmured, as she looked at the effect: "How glad I am! My mantelpiece is furnished now." She added almost immediately in a tone of conviction: "You know Vaudrec is awfully nice. You will be friends with him at once."

A ring at the door announced the count. He entered quickly, quite at his ease, as though he were at home. After having gallantly kissed the young wife's fingers, he turned to the husband and cordially held out his hand, saying:

"How goes it, my dear Duroy?"

It was no longer his former stiff and

starched bearing, but an affable one, showing that the situation was no longer the same. The journalist, surprised, strove to make himself agreeable in response to these advances. Within five minutes one might have supposed they had known and loved one another for ten years.

Then Madeleine, whose face was radiant, said: "I will leave you together. I must go and see about dinner." And she went out, followed by a glance from both men. When she returned, she found them talking theatricals apropos of a new play, and so thoroughly of the same opinion that a species of rapid friendship awoke in their eyes at the discovery of this absolute identity of ideas.

The dinner was delightful, so intimate and cordial, and the count stayed on quite late, so comfortable did he feel in this pretty new household.

As soon as he had left, Madeleine said to her husband: "Is he not perfect? He improves in every way on acquaintance. He is a true friend—safe, devoted, faithful. Ah, without him——"

She did not finish the sentence, and George replied: "Yes, I find him very agreeable. I think that we shall get on very well together."

She resumed: "You do not know, but we have some work to do together before going to bed. I had not time to speak to you about it before dinner, because Vaudrec came in at once. I have had some important news, news from Morocco. It was Laroche-Mathieu, the deputy, the future minister, who brought it me. We must work up an important article, a sensational one. I have the facts and figures. We will set to work at once. Bring the lamp."

He took it and they passed into the study. The same books were ranged on the book shelves, on top of which were the three vases bought at the Golfe Juan by Forestier on the eve of his death. Under the table the dead man's rug awaited the feet of Duroy, who, on sitting down, took up an ivory penholder slightly chewed at the end by the other's teeth. Madeleine leaned against the mantelpiece, and having lit a cigarette, related her news, and then explained her ideas and the plan of the article she wished written. He listened attentively, scribbling notes as he did so, and when she had finished, raised objections, took up the subject again, enlarging it, and developing in his turn not the plan of an article, but of a campaign against the existing ministry. This attack would be the commencement. His wife had left off smoking, so strongly was her interest aroused, so vast was the vision that opened before her as she followed out George's train of thought.

She murmured from time to time: "Yes, yes. That is very good. That is capital. That is very clever."

And when he had finished speaking in turn, she said: "Now let us write."

But he always found it hard to begin and had difficulty in finding words. Then she approached softly, and, leaning over his shoulder, began to whisper sentences in his ear. From time to time she would hesitate and ask, "Is that what you want to say?"

He answered: "Yes, exactly."

Duroy, from time to time, added a few original lines, which gave force and depth to the line of attack. When their article was finished, George read it aloud.

They both thought it excellent and smiled, delighted and surprised, as if each had become a revelation to the other.

The article appeared with the signature of George du Roy de Cantel and caused a great sensation. There was an excitement about it in the Chamber. Daddy Walter congratulated the author and entrusted him with the political editorship of the *Vie Française*. The "Echoes" were taken up again by Boisrenard.

Then there began in the paper a violent and cleverly conducted campaign against the ministry. The attack, now ironical, now serious, now jesting and now virulent, but always skillful and based on facts, was delivered with a certitude and continuity which astonished every one. Other papers continually cited the *Vie Française*, taking whole passages from it, and those in office asked themselves whether they could not gag this unknown and inveterate foe with the gift of a prefecture.

Duroy became a political celebrity. He felt his influence increasing by the pressure of hands and the lifting of hats. His wife, too, filled him with astonishment and admiration by the ingenuity of her mind, the accuracy of her information and the number of her acquaintances. Continually he would find in his drawing-room, on returning home, a senator, a deputy, a magistrate, a general, who treated Madeleine as an old friend, with sober familiarity. Where had she met all these people? In society, so she said. But how had she been able to gain their confidence and their affection? He could not understand it.

"She would make a formidable diplomatist," he thought.

She often came in late at meal times, out of breath, flushed, quivering, and before even taking off her veil would say: "I have something good to-day. Fancy, the Minister of Justice has just appointed two magistrates who belonged to the fusion committees. We will give him a dose he will not forget in a hurry."

And they would give the minister a dose, and another the next day, and a third the day after. The deputy Laroche-Mathieu, who dined at the Rue Fontaine every Tuesday, after the Comte de Vaudrec, who began the week, would shake hands with husband and wife with an appearance of extreme delight. He never ceased repeating: "By Jove, what a campaign! If we don't succeed after that!"

He hoped, indeed, to succeed in getting hold of the portfolio of foreign affairs, which he had had in view for a long time.

It was said everywhere of him: "Laroche will be a minister," and he believed more firmly than any one else that he would be. He was one of the chief stockholders in Daddy Walter's paper and his colleague and partner in many financial schemes.

Duroy backed him up with confidence and with vague hopes as to the future. He was, besides, only continuing the work begun by Forestier, to whom Laroche-Mathieu had promised the Cross of the Legion of Honor when the day of triumph should come. The decoration would adorn the breast of Madeleine's second husband, that was all. Nothing was changed in the main.

It was seen about this time that Duroy's comrades organized a joke against him, at which he was beginning to grow

angry. They no longer called him anything but Forestier. As soon as he entered the office some one would call out: "I say, Forestier!"

He would pretend not to hear and would look for the letters in his pigeonhole. The voice would resume in louder tones: "Hi, Forestier."

Daddy Walter himself had declared, when astonishment was expressed at the flagrant similarity in style and inspiration between the leaders of the new political editor and his predecessor: "Yes, it is Forestier, but a fuller, stronger, more manly Forestier."

This wounded his pride, wounded his vanity, that touchy pride and vanity of the writer which produce the nervous susceptibility, ever on the alert, equally in the reporter and the genial poet. The word "Forestier" made his ears tingle. He dreaded to hear it and felt himself redden when he did so. This name was to him a biting jest, more than a jest, almost an insult. It said to him: "It is your wife who does your work as she did that of the other. You would be nothing without her."

His rancor was daily increased by a thousand insignificant details, which stung him like pin pricks, by the incessant reminders of the other arising out of a word from Madeleine, from the man servant, from the waiting maid.

One evening toward the end of June, as he was smoking a cigarette at the window, the fineness of the evening inspired him with a wish for a drive and he said: "Madeleine, shall we go as far as the Bois de Boulogne?"

"Why, yes."

They took an open carriage and drove up the Champs Elysées and then along the main avenue of the Bois de Boulogne.

"Do you remember the forest close to your home, how gloomy it was?" said she. "It seemed to me that it was full of horrible creatures, and that there was no end to it, while here it is delightful. One feels caresses in the very breeze, and I know that Sèvres lies on the other side of the wood."

He replied: "Oh, in the forest at home there was nothing but deer, foxes and wild boars and here and there the hut of a forester."

This word, akin to the dead man's name, issuing from his mouth, surprised him just as if some one had shouted it out to him from the depths of a thicket, and he became suddenly silent, assailed anew by the strange and persistent uneasiness, the gnawing, invincible, jealous irritation that had been spoiling his existence for some time past. After a minute or so he asked: "Did you ever come here like this of an evening with Charles?"

"Yes, often," she answered.

And all of a sudden he was seized with a wish to return home, a nervous desire that gripped him at the heart. But the image of Forestier had returned to his mind and possessed and laid hold of him. He could no longer speak or think of anything else and said in a spiteful tone: "I say, Maisie!"

"Yes, dear."

"Did you ever deceive poor Charles?"

He had put his lips close to his wife's ear and whispered: "Come, come, confess."

She jerked herself away and said abruptly: "You are crazy. As if one answered such questions."

She said this in so singular a tone that a cold shiver ran through her

husband's veins, and he remained dumbfounded, astonished, almost breathless, as though from some mental shock.

The carriage was now passing along the lake, on which the sky seemed to have scattered its stars. Two swans, vaguely outlined, were swimming slowly, scarcely visible in the shadow. George called out to the driver: "Turn back!" and the carriage returned, meeting the others going at a walk, with their lanterns gleaming like eyes in the night.

In what a strange manner she had said it!

"Was it a confession?" Duroy kept asking himself.

And this almost certainty that she had deceived her first husband now drove him wild with rage. He longed to beat her, to strangle her, to tear her hair out. Oh, if she had only replied: "But, darling, if I had deceived him it would have been with yourself," how he would have kissed, clasped, worshipped her.

The carriage was going faster. It passed the fortifications. Duroy saw before him a reddish light in the sky like the glow of an immense forge, and heard a vast, confused, continuous rumor, made up of countless different sounds, the breath of Paris panting this summer night like an enchanted giant.

George reflected: "I should be very stupid to fret about it. Every one for himself. Fortune favors the bold. Everything is only egotism. Egotism as regards ambition and fortune is better than egotism as regards woman and love."

Madeleine, to whom this silence was irksome, said: "Suppose we have an ice at Tortoni's before going in."

He glanced at her sideways. Her delicate profile was lit up by the bright light from the row of gas jets of a café. He thought: "She is pretty. Well, so much the better. Jack is as good as his master, my dear. But if ever they catch me worrying again about you, it will be warm at the North Pole." Then he replied aloud: "Certainly, dear," and in order that she should not guess anything, he kissed her.

It seemed to the young wife that her husband's lips were frozen. He smiled, however, with his wonted smile, as he gave her his hand to alight in front of the café.

CHAPTER XI

ENTER MADAME WALTER

On reaching the office next day, Duroy sought out Boisrenard.

"My dear fellow," said he, "I have a service to ask of you. It has been considered a joke for some time past to call me Forestier. I begin to find it very stupid. Will you have the kindness to quietly let our friends know that I will slap the face of the first that starts this joke again? It will be for them to reflect whether it is worth risking a sword thrust for. I address myself

to you because you are a calm-minded fellow, who can hinder matters from coming to a painful crisis and also because you were my second."

Boisrenard undertook the commission. Duroy went out on business and returned an hour later. No one called him Forestier.

When he reached home he heard ladies' voices in the drawing-room and asked: "Who is there?"

"Madame Walter and Madame de Marelle," replied the servant.

His heart beat fast for a moment and then he said to himself: "Well, let's see," and opened the door.

Clotilde was beside the fireplace, standing in a ray of light from the window. It seemed to George that she grew slightly paler on perceiving him. Having first bowed to Madame Walter and her two daughters, seated like two sentinels on each side of their mother, he turned toward Madame de Marelle. She held out her hand and he took it and pressed it meaningly, as though to say: "I still love you." She responded to this pressure.

He inquired: "How have you been during the century that has elapsed since our last meeting?"

She replied with perfect ease: "Quite well, and you, Bel-Ami?" and, turning to Madeleine, added: "You will allow me to call him Bel-Ami still?"

"Certainly, dear; I will allow whatever you please."

A shade of irony seemed hidden in these words.

Madame Walter spoke of an entertainment that was going to be given by Jacques Rival at his residence, a grand fencing match, at which ladies of fashion were to be present, saying: "It will be very interesting. But I am so vexed we have no one to take us there, my husband being obliged to be away at that time."

Duroy at once offered his services. She accepted, saying: "My daughters and I will be very much obliged to you."

He looked at the younger daughter and thought: "She is not at all bad-looking, this little Susan; not at all."

The elder sister, Rose, was ugly, dull-looking and insignificant, one of those girls whom you do not notice, do not speak to and do not talk about.

The mother rose, and, turning to George, said: "Then I may count upon you for next Thursday, two o'clock?"

"You may count upon me, madame," he replied.

As soon as she had taken her departure, Madame de Marelle rose in turn, saying: "Good-afternoon, Bel-Ami."

As soon as he was alone with his wife, Madeleine broke out into a laugh, a frank, gay laugh, and, looking him fair in the face, said: "You know that Madame Walter is smitten with you."

"Nonsense," he answered incredulously.

"It is so, I tell you. She spoke to me about you with wild enthusiasm. It is strange on her part. She would like to find two husbands such as you for her daughters. Fortunately, as regards her, such things are of no moment."

He did not understand what she meant and inquired: "How of no moment?"

She replied, with the conviction of a woman certain of the soundness of her judgment: "Oh, Madame Walter is one of those who have never even

had a whisper about them, never, you know, never. She is unassailable in every respect. Her husband you know as well as I do. But with her it is quite another thing. She has suffered enough through marrying a Jew, but she has remained faithful to him. She is an honest woman."

Duroy was surprised. "I thought her a Jewess, too," said he.

"She, not at all. She is a lady patroness of all the good works of the Church of the Madeleine. Her marriage, even, was celebrated religiously. I do not know whether there was a dummy baptism as regards Monsieur Walter, or whether the Church winked at it."

George murmured: "Ah! so she likes me."

"Positively and thoroughly. If you were single, I should advise you to ask for the hand of—Susan, eh? rather than that of Rose."

He replied, twisting his mustache: "Hum! their mother is not yet out of date."

Madeleine, somewhat out of patience, answered: "Their mother! I wish you may get her, dear. But I am not alarmed on that score. It is not at her age that a woman is guilty of a first fault. One must set about it earlier."

George was reflecting: "If it were true, though, that I could have married Susan." Then he shrugged his shoulders: "Bah! it is absurd. As if her father would ever have accepted me as a suitor."

He promised himself, though, to keep a more careful watch in the future over Madame Walter's bearing toward him, without asking whether he might ever derive any advantage from this.

On the Thursday he said to Madeleine: "Are not you coming to the fencing match at Rival's?"

"No. It would not interest me. I shall go to the Chamber of Deputies."

He went to call for Madame Walter in an open landau, for the weather was delightful. He was surprised at seeing her so handsome and young-looking. She had the calm, lady-like manner, a certain matronly bearing that caused her to pass almost unnoticed before the eyes of gallants. She scarcely spoke, besides, except to make ordinary, conventional and commonplace remarks, her ideas being proper, methodical, well-ordered and void of all extravagance.

Her daughter, Susan, in pink, looked like a newly varnished Watteau, while her elder sister seemed the governess entrusted with the care of this pretty doll of a girl.

Before Rival's door a line of carriages were drawn up. Duroy offered Madame Walter his arm, and they went in.

The fencing match was to take place under the patronage of the wives of all the senators and deputies connected with the *Vie Française* for the benefit of the orphans of the Sixth Arrondissement of Paris. Madame Walter had promised to come with her daughters, while refusing the position of lady patroness, for she only aided with her name works undertaken by the clergy. Not that she was very devout, but her marriage with a Jew obliged her, in her opinion, to observe a certain religious attitude, and the gathering organized by the journalist had a species of Republican import that might be construed as anti-clerical.

Jacques Rival received the guests in the hall of his dwelling, where a re-

freshment buffet had been fitted up, the cost of which was to be deducted from the receipts. He indicated with an amiable gesture the little staircase leading to the cellar, saying: "Downstairs, ladies, downstairs; the match will take place in the basement."

He darted forward to meet the wife of the manager, and then shaking Duroy by the hand, said: "How are you, Bel-Ami?"

His friend was surprised and exclaimed: "Who told you that——"

Rival interrupted with: "Madame Walter here, who thinks the nickname a very nice one."

Madame Walter blushed, saying: "Yes, I will admit that, if I knew you better, I would do like little Laurine and call you Bel-Ami, too; the name suits you very well."

Duroy laughed as he replied: "But I beg of you, madame, to do so."

She had lowered her eyes and remarked: "No. We are not sufficiently intimate."

He murmured: "Will you allow me to hope that we shall become more so?"

"Well, we will see," said she.

He moved aside to let her precede him at the beginning of the narrow stairs lit by a gas jet.

Madame Walter and her daughters reached the seats reserved for them in the front row. Duroy, having installed them there, was about to quit them, saying: "I am obliged to leave you; we men must not monopolize the seats."

But Madame Walter remarked, in a hesitating tone: "I should very much like to have you with us all the same. You can tell me the names of the fencers. Come, if you stand close to the end of the seat you will not be in any one's way." She looked at him with her large, mild eyes and persisted, saying: "Come, stay with us, Monsieur Bel-Ami. We have need of you."

He replied: "I will obey with pleasure, madame."

On all sides could be heard the remark: "It is very funny, this cellar; very pretty, too."

George knew it well, this vault. He recalled the morning he had passed there on the eve of his duel, alone in front of the little white cardboard target that had glared at him from the depths of the inner cellar like a huge and terrible eye.

The voice of Jacques Rival sounded from the staircase: "Just about to begin, ladies."

They were two good professional fencers of second-class merit. They made their appearance, both sparely built, with a military air and somewhat stiff gestures. Having gone through the salute like automatons, they began to attack one another, resembling in their costumes of white leather and duck two comedy clowns fighting for fun, and the six judges nodded with their air of connoisseurs.

The first couple of fencers were succeeded by Monsieur Planton and Monsieur Carapin, a civilian professional and a military professional. Monsieur Planton was very little and Monsieur Carapin immensely stout. One would have thought that the first thrust would have reduced his volume like that of a balloon. People laughed. Monsieur Planton skipped about like a monkey; Monsieur Carapin only moved his arm, the rest of his frame being paralyzed by fat.

Then came Monsieur Porion and Monsieur Lapalme, a professional and

an amateur, who gave way to exaggerated gymnastics; charging furiously at one another, obliging the judges to scuttle away with their chairs; crossing and recrossing from one end of the platform to the other, one advancing and the other retreating, with vigorous and comic leaps and bounds. They indulged in little backward springs that made the ladies laugh and long bounds forward that caused them some emotion. This galloping assault was aptly criticised by some young rascal, who sang out: "Don't kill yourselves over it; it is a time job!" The spectators, shocked at this want of taste, cried "Sh!" The judgment of the experts was passed round.

The first half of the entertainment was concluded by a very fine bout between Jacques Rival and the celebrated Belgian professor, Lebègue. Rival greatly pleased the ladies.

The heat down below was getting terrible. Cries of "More air," "Something to drink" were heard.

A loud voice shouted: "We are suffocating down here. Finish quickly and let us be off." Another cried out: "The collection." And the whole of the public, gasping, but good-humored all the same, repeated: "The collection, the collection."

Six ladies began to pass along between the seats, and the sound of money falling into the collection pouches could be heard.

Duroy pointed out the celebrities to Madame Walter. There were men of fashion and journalists, those attached to the great newspapers, the old established newspapers, which looked down upon the *Vie Française* with certain reserve, the fruit of their experience. They had witnessed the death of so many of these politico-financial sheets, offspring of a suspicious partnership and crushed by the fall of a ministry. There were also painters and sculptors, who are generally men with a taste for sport; a poet who was also a member of the Academy, and who was pointed out generally, and a number of distinguished foreigners.

Some one called out: "Good-day, my dear fellow." It was the Comte de Vaudrec. Making his excuses to the ladies, Duroy hastened to shake hands with him. On returning he remarked: "What a charming fellow Vaudrec is! How thoroughly blood tells in him!"

Madame Walter did not reply. She was somewhat fatigued, and her bosom rose with an effort every time she drew breath, which caught the eye of Duroy. From time to time he caught a glance, a troubled, hesitating glance which lighted upon him and was at once averted, and he said to himself: "Eh! What! Have I caught her, too?"

But by degrees the crowd worked their way up the little staircase. At last they would be able to get something to drink. There was an outburst of indignation when they found that those who could not get into the crowded cellar had stripped the refreshment buffet and had then gone away, declaring that it was very impolite to bring together two hundred people and not give them anything to look at. There was not a cake, not a drop of champagne, syrup or beer left; not a sweetmeat, not a fruit—nothing. They had sacked, pillaged, swept away everything. These details were related by the servants, who pulled long faces to hide their impulse to laugh right out. "The

ladies were worse than the gentlemen," they asserted, "and ate and drank enough to make themselves ill." It was like the story of the survivors after the sack of a captured town.

There was nothing to do but to leave. Gentlemen openly regretted the twenty francs given at the collection; they were indignant that those upstairs should have feasted without paying anything. The lady patronesses had collected upward of three thousand francs. All expenses paid, there remained two hundred and twenty francs for the orphans of the Sixth Arrondissement.

Duroy, escorting the Walter family, waited for his landau. As he drove back with them, seated opposite Madame Walter, he again caught her caressing and fugitive glance, which seemed disturbed.

He returned home joyously. Madeleine was waiting for him in the drawing-room.

"I have some news," said she. "The Morocco affair is becoming complicated. France may very likely send out an expeditionary force within a few months. At all events it will be made a pretext to upset the ministry and Laroche-Mathieu will profit by this to get hold of the portfolio of foreign affairs."

Duroy, to tease his wife, pretended not to believe anything of the kind. They would never be mad enough to begin the Tunisian bungle over again. But she shrugged her shoulders impatiently, saying: "But I tell you it is so, it is so! You don't understand that it is a matter of money. Nowadays in political complications we must not ask: 'Who is the woman?' but 'What is the deal?' "

He murmured "Bah" in a contemptuous tone in order to excite her.

Madeleine turned her back on him, disdaining to pursue the subject, and then, after a moment's silence, resumed: "We shall have visitors on Tuesday. Madame Laroche-Mathieu is coming to dinner with the Vicomtesse de Percemur. Will you invite Rival and Norbert de Varenne? I will call to-morrow and ask Madame Walter and Madame de Marelle. Perhaps we shall have Madame Rissolin, too."

For some time past she had been strengthening her connections, making use of her husband's political influence to attract to her house, willy-nilly, the wives of the senators and deputies who had need of the support of the *Vie Française*.

George replied: "Very well. I will see about Rival and Norbert."

The next day, as she was to go and invite Madame Walter, he resolved to forestall her in order to catch the latter alone and see if she really cared for him. It amused and flattered him. And then—why not?—if it were possible.

He arrived at the Boulevard Malesherbes about two and was shown into the drawing-room, where he waited till Madame Walter made her appearance, her hand outstretched with pleased eagerness, saying: "What good wind brings you hither?"

"No good wind, but the wish to see you. Some power has brought me here, I do not know why, for I have nothing to say to you. I came, here I am; will you forgive me this early visit and the frankness of this explanation?"

He uttered this in a gallant and jesting tone, with a smile on his lips. She was astonished and colored somewhat,

murmuring: "But really—I do not understand—you surprise me."

He observed: "It is a declaration made jestingly, in order not to alarm you."

They had sat down in front of one another. She took the matter pleasantly, saying: "A serious declaration?"

"Yes. For a long time I have been wanting to utter it—for a very long time. But I dared not. They say you are so strict, so rigid."

She had recovered her assurance and observed: "Why to-day, then?"

"I do not know." Then, lowering his voice, he added: "Or, rather, because I have been thinking of nothing but you since yesterday."

She stammered, growing suddenly pale: "Come, enough of nonsense; let us speak of something else."

But he had fallen at her feet so suddenly that she was frightened. She tried to rise, but he kept her seated by the strength of his two arms passed round her waist, and repeated in a voice of passion: "Yes, it is true that I have loved you madly for a long time past. Do not answer me. What would you have? I am mad. I love you. Oh, if you knew how I love you!"

She was suffocating, gasping and strove to speak, without being able to utter a word. She pushed him away with her two hands, having seized him by the hair to hinder the approach of the mouth that she felt coming toward her own. She kept turning her head from right to left and from left to right with a rapid motion, closing her eyes in order no longer to see him. He touched her through her dress, handled her, pressed her, and she almost fainted under this strong and rude caress. Then he got up, exclaimed "Farewell, farewell," and rushed away.

He quietly took his stick in the hall and gained the street, saying to himself: "By Jove, I believe I have not made a mistake!"

On returning home at his usual time he said to his wife: "Well, have you secured all the people for your dinner?"

She answered: "Yes, there is only Madame Walter, who is not quite sure whether she will be free to come."

He shrugged his shoulders, saying: "Oh, yes, she'll come."

He was not certain, however, and remained anxious until the day of the dinner. That very morning Madeleine received a note from her: "I have managed to get free from my engagements with great difficulty, and shall be with you this evening. But my husband cannot accompany me."

He awaited her appearance with some slight uneasiness. She came, very calm, rather cool and slightly haughty. He became humble, discreet and submissive. Madame Laroche-Mathieu and Madame Rissolin accompanied their husbands. The Vicomtesse de Percemur talked society. Madame de Marelle looked charming in a strangely fanciful toilet, a species of Spanish costume in black and yellow, which set off her neat figure, her bosom, her rounded arms and her birdlike head.

Duroy had Madame Walter on his right hand, and during dinner only spoke to her on serious topics and with an exaggerated respect. From time to time he glanced at Clotilde. "She is really prettier and fresher looking than ever," he thought. Then his eyes returned to his wife, whom he found not bad-look-

ing, either, although he retained toward her a hidden, tenacious and evil anger.

But Madame Walter excited him by the difficulty of victory and by that novelty always desired by man. She wanted to return home early. "I will escort you," said he.

She refused, but he persisted, saying: "Why will not you permit me? You will wound me keenly. Do not let me think you have not forgiven me. You see how quiet I am."

She answered: "But you cannot desert your guests like that."

He smiled. "But I shall only be away twenty minutes. They will not even notice it. If you refuse, you will cut me to the heart."

She murmured: "Well, then, I agree, if you will be discreet."

But as soon as they were in the carriage he seized her hand, and kissing it passionately, exclaimed: "I love you, I love you. Let me tell you that much. I will not touch you. I only want to repeat to you that I love you."

She stammered: "Oh, after what you promised me! This is wrong, very wrong."

He whispered in her ear, understanding that he must capture her by degrees, this simple woman, that he must get her to make appointments with him, where she would at first, where he wished afterward. "Listen, I must see you; I shall wait for you at your door like a beggar; but I will see you, I will see you to-morrow."

She repeated: "No, do not come. I shall not receive you. Think of my daughters."

"Then tell me where I can meet you —in the street, no matter where, at whatever hour you like, provided I see you. I will bow to you; I will say: 'I love you,' and I will go away."

She hesitated, bewildered. And as the brougham entered the gateway of her residence she murmured hurriedly: "Well, then, I shall be at the Church of the Trinity to-morrow at half-past three." Then, having alighted, she said to her coachman: "Drive Monsieur Duroy back to his house."

As he re-entered his home, his wife asked: "Where did you go?"

He replied in a low tone: "I went to the telegraph office to send off a message."

Madame de Marelle approached them. "You will see me home, Bel-Ami," said she. "You know I only came such a distance to dinner on that condition." And, turning to Madeleine, she added: "You are not jealous?"

Madame Duroy answered slowly: "Not overmuch."

Clotilde, wrapped in lace, said to Madeleine as she went out: "Your dinner was perfection. In a little while you will have the leading political drawing-room in Paris."

As soon as she was alone with George she clasped him in her arms, exclaiming: "Oh, Bel-Ami, I love you more and more every day."

The cab conveying them rocked like a ship.

"It is not so pleasant," said she.

He answered: "Oh, no." But he was thinking of Madame Walter.

CHAPTER XII

A FRESH CONQUEST

The Place de la Trinité lay, almost deserted, under a dazzling July sun. An oppressive heat was crushing Paris. It was as though the upper air, scorched and deadened, had fallen upon the city —a thick, burning air that pained the chests inhaling it. The fountains in front of the church fell lazily.

Duroy pulled out his watch. It was only three o'clock. He was half an hour too soon. He laughed as he thought of this appointment. "Churches serve for everything, as far as she is concerned," said he to himself. "They console her for having married a Jew and enable her to assume an attitude of protestation in the world of politics. So much for the habit of making use of religion as an umbrella. If it is fine, it is a walking-stick; if sunny, a parasol; if it rains, a shelter; and if one does not go out, why one leaves it in the hall. And there are hundreds like that, who care for God about as much as a cherry-stone, but who will not hear Him spoken against."

He walked slowly along the edge of the fountain and then again looked at the church clock, which was two minutes faster than his watch.

He returned toward the door and again looked at his watch. It was still only a quarter past three. He sat down at the entrance to the main aisle, regretting that one could not smoke a cigarette.

Some one came in, and George turned sharply round. It was a poor woman in a woolen skirt, who fell on her knees close to the first chair and remained motionless, with clasped hands, her eyes turned to heaven, her soul absorbed in prayer. Duroy watched her with interest, asking himself what grief, what pain, what despair could have crushed her heart. She was worn out by poverty, it was plain. She had perhaps, too, a husband who was beating her to death, or a dying child. He murmured mentally: "Poor creatures! How some of them do suffer." Anger rose up in him against pitiless Nature. Then he reflected that these poor wretches believed, at any rate, that they were taken into consideration up above, and that they were duly entered in the registers of heaven with a debtor and creditor balance.

The rustle of a dress made him start. It was she.

He rose and advanced quickly. She did not hold out her hand, but murmured in a low voice: "I have only a few moments. I must get back home. Kneel down near me, so that we may not be noticed." And she advanced up the aisle, seeking a safe and suitable spot. Her face was hidden by a thick veil, and she walked with careful footsteps that could scarcely be heard.

When she reached the choir, she turned and muttered, in that mysterious tone of voice we always assume in church: "The side aisles will be better. We are too much in view here."

She bowed low to the high altar, turned to the right and returned a little way toward the entrance; then mak-

ing up her mind, she took a chair and knelt down. George took possession of the one next to her, and as soon as they were in an attitude of prayer, began: "Thanks, oh, thanks. I adore you. I should like to be always telling you so, to tell you how I began to love you, how I was captivated the first time I saw you. Will you allow me some day to open my heart to tell you this?"

She listened to him in an attitude of deep meditation, as if she heard nothing.

He felt her shoulder trembling against him and her bosom throbbing, and she stammered abruptly: "I love you, too."

He started as though he had received a blow and sighed, "Good God!"

She replied in faltering tones: "Ought I to have told you that? I feel I am contemptible. I, who have two daughters; but I cannot help it, I cannot help it. I could not have believed, I should never have thought—but it is stronger than I. Listen, listen; I have never loved any one but you; I swear it. And I have loved you for a year past in secret, in my secret heart. Oh, I have suffered and struggled till I can do so no more. I love you."

She was weeping, with her hands crossed in front of her face, and her whole frame was quivering, shaken by the violence of her emotion.

He placed the hand he held upon his heart, saying: "Do you feel it beat?" For he had come to the end of his passionate phrases.

But for some moments past the regular footsteps of a promenader had been coming nearer. He had gone the round of the altars and was now, for the second time at least, coming down the little aisle on the right.

When Madame Walter heard him close to the pillar which hid her, she snatched her fingers from George's grasp and again hid her face. And both remained motionless, kneeling as though they had been addressing fervent supplications to Heaven together.

Duroy, who was thinking of making an appointment elsewhere than at the Church of the Trinity, murmured: "Where shall I see you to-morrow?"

She did not answer. She seemed lifeless—turned into a statue of prayer. He went on: "To-morrow, will you let me meet you in the Parc Monceau?"

She turned toward him her uncovered face, a livid face, contracted by fearful suffering, and in a jerky voice ejaculated: "Leave me, leave me now; go away, go away, only for five minutes. I suffer too much beside you. I want to pray and I cannot. Go away; let me pray alone for five minutes. I cannot. Let me implore God to pardon me —to save me. Leave me for five minutes."

Her face was so upset, so full of pain that he rose without saying a word, and then, after a little hesitation, asked: "Shall I come back, presently?"

She gave a nod, which meant "Yes, presently," and he walked away toward the choir.

She understood that it was all over, that the struggle was a useless one. She would not yield, however; and she was seized by one of those nervous crises that hurl women quivering, yelling and writhing on the ground. She trembled in every limb, feeling that she was going to fall and roll between the chairs, screaming. Some one approached

with rapid steps. It was a priest. She rose and rushed toward him, holding out her clasped hands and stammering: "Oh, save me, save me!"

He halted in surprise, saying: "What is it you wish, madame?"

"I want you to save me. Have pity on me. If you do not come to my assistance I am lost."

He looked at her, asking himself whether she was not mad, and then said: "What can I do for you?"

He was a tall and somewhat stout young man, with full pendulous cheeks, dark, with a carefully shaven face, a good-looking city curate belonging to a wealthy district and accustomed to rich penitents.

"Hear my confession and advise me, sustain me. Tell me what I am to do."

He replied: "I hear confessions every Saturday from three to six o'clock."

Having seized his arm, she gripped it tightly as she repeated: "No, no, no, at once, at once. You must. He is here, in the church. He is waiting for me."

"Who is waiting for you?" asked the priest.

"A man who will ruin me, who will carry me off if you do not save me. I cannot flee from him. I am too weak —too weak. Oh, so weak—so weak!" She fell at his feet, sobbing: "Oh, have pity on me, father! Save me, in God's name, save me!"

And, fumbling in his pocket, he drew out a ring full of keys, selected one, and walked rapidly toward the little wooden cabinet. He entered the centre door, which he closed behind him, and Madame Walter, throwing herself into the narrow recess at the side, stammered fervently, with a passionate burst of hope: "Bless me, father, for I have sinned!"

Duroy, having taken a turn round the chair, passed down the left aisle.

Approaching the main entrance, he saw the poor woman still on her knees and still praying. He thought: "By Jove! she keeps hard at it." He was no longer moved and no longer pitied her. He passed on, began quietly to walk up the right-hand aisle to find Madame Walter again. He marked the place where he had left her from a distance, astonished at not seeing her. He thought he had made a mistake in the pillar, went on as far as the end one and then returned. She had gone, then. He was surprised and enraged. Then he thought she might be looking for him and made the circuit of the church again. Not finding her, he returned and sat down on the chair she had occupied, hoping that she would rejoin him there, and waited. Soon a low murmur of voices aroused his attention. He had not seen any one in that part of the church. Whence came this whispering? He rose to see, and perceived in the adjacent chapel the doors of the confessional. The skirt of a dress issuing from one of these trailed on the pavement. He approached to examine the woman. He recognized her. She was confessing. He felt a violent inclination to take her by the shoulders and to pull her out of the box. Then he thought: "Bah! it is the priest's turn now; it will be mine to-morrow." And he sat down quietly in front of the confessional, biding his time, and chuckling now over the adventure. He waited a long time. At length Madame Walter rose, turned round, saw him and came up to him. Her expression was cold and severe. "Sir," said she,

"I beg of you not to accompany me, not to follow me and not to come to my house alone. You will not be received. Farewell!"

And she walked away with a dignified bearing. He let her depart, for one of his principles was never to force matters. Then, as the priest, somewhat upset, issued in turn from his box, he walked up to him and, looking him right in the eyes, growled to his face: "If you did not wear a petticoat, what a slap you would get across your ugly chops." After which he turned on his heels and went out of the church, whistling between his teeth.

The journalist, finding himself at liberty, went to the office of the *Vie Française*. As soon as he entered he saw by the busy air of the messengers that something out of the common was happening, and at once went into the manager's room. Daddy Walter, in a state of nervous excitement, was standing up dictating an article in broken sentences; issuing orders to the reporters, who surrounded him, between two paragraphs; giving instructions to Boisrenard and opening letters.

As Duroy came in the governor uttered a cry of joy:

"Ah! how lucky; here is Bel-Ami." He stopped short, somewhat confused, and excused himself. "I beg your pardon for speaking like that, but I am very much disturbed by certain events. And then I hear my wife and daughter speaking of you as Bel-Ami from morning till night and have ended by falling into the habit myself. You are not offended?"

"Not at all!" said George, laughingly; "there is nothing in that nickname to displease me."

Daddy Walter went on: "Very well, then, I christen you Bel-Ami, like every one else. Well, the fact is, great things are taking place. The ministry has been overthrown by a vote of three hundred and ten to a hundred and two. Our prorogation is again postponed, postponed to the Greek calends, and here we are at the 28th of July. Spain is angry about the Morocco business, and it is that which has overthrown Durand de l'Aine and his following. We are right in the swim. Marrot is entrusted with the formation of a new cabinet. He takes General Boutin d'Acre as Minister of War and our friend Laroche-Mathieu for foreign affairs. We are going to become an official organ. I am writing a leader, a simple declaration of our principles, pointing out the line to be followed by the ministry." The old boy smiled and continued: "The line they intend following, be it understood. But I want something interesting about Morocco; something up to date; a sensational article; something or other. Get up one for me."

Duroy reflected for a moment and then replied: "I have the very thing for you. I will give you a study of the political situation of the whole of our African colony, with Tunis on the left, Algeria in the middle and Morocco on the right; the history of the races inhabiting this vast extent of territory, and the narrative of an excursion on the frontier of Morocco to the great oasis of Figuig, where no European has penetrated, and which is the cause of the present conflict. Will that suit you?"

"Admirably!" exclaimed Daddy Walter. "And the title?"

"'From Tunis to Tangiers.'"

"Splendid!"

Duroy went off to search the files of the *Vie Française* for his first article, "Souvenirs d'un Chasseur d'Afrique," which, rebaptized, touched up and modified, would do admirably, since it dealt with colonial policy, the Algerian population and an excursion in the province of Oran. In three-quarters of an hour it was rewritten, touched up and brought to date, with a flavor of realism and praises of the new cabinet. The manager, having read the article, said: "It is capital, capital, capital. You are an invaluable fellow. I congratulate you."

And Duroy went home to dinner delighted with his day's work, despite the check at the Church of the Trinity, for he felt the battle won. His wife was anxiously waiting for him. She exclaimed as soon as she saw him: "Do you know that Laroche-Mathieu is Minister for Foreign Affairs?"

"Yes; I have just written an article on Algeria in connection with it."

"What?"

"You know, the first we wrote together, 'Souvenirs d'un Chasseur d'Afrique,' revised and corrected for the occasion."

She smiled, saying: "Ah! that is very good." Then, after a few moments' reflection, she continued: "I was thinking—that continuation you were to have written then and that you—put off. We might set to work on it now. It would make a nice series and very appropriate to the situation."

He replied, sitting down to table: "Exactly, and there is nothing in the way of it now that sucker of a Forestier is dead."

She said quietly, in a dry and hurt tone: "That joke is more than out of place, and I beg of you to put an end to it. It has lasted too long already."

He was about to make an ironical answer, when a telegram was brought him containing these words: "I had lost my senses. Forgive me and come at four o'clock to-morrow to the Parc Monceau."

He understood, and with heart suddenly filled with joy he said to his wife, as he slipped the message into his pocket: "I will not do so any more, darling; it was stupid, I admit."

And he began his dinner. While eating he kept repeating to himself the words: "I had lost my senses. Forgive me and come at four o'clock to-morrow to the Parc Monceau." He began to laugh, and Madeleine asked: "What is it?"

"Nothing," he answered. "I was thinking of a priest I met just now, who had a very comical face."

Duroy arrived exactly on time at the appointed place next day. On the benches of the park were seated citizens overcome by heat and careless nurses who seemed to be dreaming while their children were rolling on the gravel of the paths. He found Madame Walter in the little antique ruin in which there is a flowing spring. She was walking round the little circle of columns with an uneasy and unhappy air. As soon as he had greeted her she exclaimed: "What a number of people there are in this garden!"

He seized the opportunity: "It is true. Will you come somewhere else?"

"But where?"

"No matter where, in a cab, for instance. You can draw down the blind on your side and you will be quite invisible."

"Yes, I prefer that; here I am dying

with fear."

"Well, come and meet me in five minutes at the gate opening on to the outer boulevard. I will have a cab."

And he darted off.

As soon as she had rejoined him and had carefully drawn down the blind on her side, she asked: "Where have you told the driver to take us?"

George replied: "Do not trouble yourself; he knows what to do."

He had given the man his address in the Rue de Constantinople.

She resumed: "You cannot imagine what I suffered on account of you, how I am tortured and tormented. Yesterday in the church I was cruel, but I wanted to flee from you at any cost. I was so afraid to find myself alone with you. Have you forgiven me?"

He squeezed her hands: "Yes, yes. What would I not forgive you, loving you as I do?"

She looked at him with a supplicating air: "Listen, you must promise to respect me—not to—not to—otherwise I cannot see you again."

He did not reply at once; he wore under his mustache that subtle smile that disturbed women. He ended by murmuring: "I am your slave."

Then she began to tell him how she had discovered that she was in love with him on learning that he was going to marry Madeleine Forestier. She gave details, little details of dates, etc. Suddenly she paused. The cab had stopped. Duroy opened the door.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"Get out and come into this house," he replied. "We shall be more at ease there."

CHAPTER XIII

A SECRET OF DIPLOMACY

Autumn had come. The Duroys had passed the whole of the summer in Paris carrying on a vigorous campaign in the *Vie Française* during the short vacation of the deputies.

The journal had gained considerably in importance through its known connection with the party in office. It published political intelligence in advance of the most important papers and hinted discreetly the intentions of its friends, the ministry, so that all the papers of Paris and the provinces took their views from it. It was quoted and feared, and people began to respect it.

Madeleine's drawing-room had been an influential centre, in which several members of the cabinet met every week. The President of the Council had even dined twice at her house, and the wives of statesmen who had formerly hesitated to cross her threshold now boasted of being her friends and paid her more visits than were returned by her. The Minister for Foreign Affairs reigned almost as a master in the household. He called at all hours, bringing despatches, news, items of information, which he dictated either to the husband or the wife, as if they had been his secretaries.

When Duroy, after the minister's departure, found himself alone with Madeleine, he would break out in a menacing tone and with bitter insinuations against the goings-on of this commonplace parvenu.

But she would shrug her shoulders contemptuously, repeating: "Do as much as he has done yourself. Become a minister, and you can have your own way. Till then, hold your tongue."

He growled: "He worries me to death, that minister of yours. He is a nincompoop."

She remarked quietly: "He is no more my minister than he is yours. He is more useful to you than to me."

He turned half round toward her, saying sneeringly: "I beg your pardon, but he does not pay court to me."

She observed slowly: "Nor to me either, but he is making our fortune."

He was silent for a few moments and then resumed: "If I had to make a choice among your admirers, I should still prefer that old fossil De Vaudrec. What has become of him? I have not seen him for a week."

"He is indisposed," replied she, unmovedly. "He wrote to me that he was even obliged to keep his bed from an attack of gout. You ought to call and ask how he is. You know he likes you very well, and it would please him."

George said: "Yes, certainly, I will go some time to-day."

And he went out. Monsieur Laroche-Mathieu was awaiting him, for he was lunching at ten o'clock that morning, the council having to meet at noon, before the opening of parliament. As soon as they were seated at table alone with the minister's private secretary, for Madame Laroche-Mathieu had been unwilling to change her own meal times, Duroy spoke of his article, sketched out the line he proposed to take, consulting notes scribbled on visiting cards, and when he had finished said: "Is there anything you think should be modified, my dear minister?"

"Very little, my dear fellow. You are, perhaps, a trifle too strongly affirmative as regards the Morocco business. Speak of the expedition as if it were going to take place; but, at the same time, letting it be understood that it will not take place, and that you do not believe in it the least in the world. Write in such a way that the public can easily read between the lines that we are not going to poke our noses into that adventure."

"Quite so. I understand, and I will make myself thoroughly understood. My wife commissioned me to ask you, on this point, whether General Belloncle will be sent to Oran. After what you have said, I conclude he will not."

The statesman answered: "No."

Then they spoke of the coming session. Laroche-Mathieu began to spout, rehearsing the phrases that he was about to pour forth on his colleagues a few hours later. A tiny, twisted mustache curled up its two ends above his lip, like scorpions' tails, and his hair, anointed with brilliantine and parted in the middle, was puffed out over his temples, after the fashion of a provincial lady-killer.

The private secretary ate and drank quietly, no doubt accustomed to these floods of loquacity; but Duroy, whom jealousy of achieved success cut to the quick, thought: "Go on, you proser. What idiots these political jokers are!" And comparing his own worth to the

frothy importance of the minister, he said to himself: "By Jove! if I had only a clear hundred thousand francs to offer myself as a candidate at home, near Rouen, and dish my cunning dullards of Normandy folk in their own sauce, what a statesman I should make beside these short-sighted rascals!"

Presently Laroche-Mathieu rang for his brougham, and, holding out his hand to the journalist, said: "You quite understand, my dear fellow?"

"Perfectly, my dear minister; you may rely upon me."

And Duroy strolled leisurely to the office to begin his article, for he had nothing to do till four o'clock. But, on reaching the office, a telegram was handed to him. It was from Madame Walter and ran as follows:

I must see you to-day. Most important. Expect me two o'clock, Rue de Constantinople. Can render you great service. Till death, VIRGINIE.

He began to swear: "Hang it all, what an infernal bore!" And seized with a fit of ill-temper, he went out again at once, too irritated to work.

From the first he had been trying to break off with her, without being able to wear out her eager attachment. He had found that he did not relish this mature and melodramatic conquest, and had simply kept away, hoping to put an end to the adventure in that way. She insisted on seeing him, however, summoning him at all hours to a hasty meeting at a street corner, at a shop or in a public garden. She would then repeat to him in a few words, always the same, that she worshipped and idolized him, and leave him, vowing that she felt so happy to have seen him. He had to call at the Walters' home, but found more pleasure in playing with Susan, who amused him by her whimsicalities. In her doll-like frame was lodged an active, arch, sly and startling wit, always ready to show itself off. She joked at everything and everybody with biting readiness. George stimulated her imagination, excited it to irony, and they understood one another marvellously. She kept appealing to him every moment: "I say, Bel-Ami. Come here, Bel-Ami."

He would at once leave the mother and go to the daughter, who would whisper some bit of spitefulness, at which they would laugh heartily.

Although disgusted with Madame Walter, he observed some circumspection on account of the *Vie Française*, and strove by dint of coolness, harshness, tempered by attention, and even rude words at times, to make her understand that there must be an end to it.

His affection for Madame de Marelle had, on the contrary, augmented during the summer. He called her his "little rascal," and she certainly charmed him. Their two natures had kindred links; they were both members of the adventurous race of vagabonds, those vagabonds in society who so strongly resemble, without being aware of it, the vagabonds of the highways.

He had fancied himself at length pretty well rid of Madame Walter, when he received at the office of the paper the telegram summoning him to meet her at two o'clock.

He thought: "What does this old screech-owl want with me now? I wager she has nothing to tell me. She will only repeat that she adores me. Yet I must

see what it means. She speaks of an important affair and a great service; perhaps it is so."

He walked slowly, dreading the meeting with Madame Walter. "Ah! I will just receive her nicely if she has nothing to tell me! Cambronne's language will be academic compared to mine. I will tell her that I will never set foot in her house again, to begin with."

He went in, and as soon as she caught sight of him she exclaimed: "Ah! you got my telegram. How fortunate!"

He put on a grumpy expression, saying: "By Jove, yes; I found it at the office just as I was going to start off to the Chamber. What is it you want now?"

She had raised her veil and drew near with the timid and submissive air of an oft-beaten dog.

"How cruel you are to me! How harshly you speak to me! What have I done to you? You cannot imagine how I suffer through you. Do you remember what you said to me in the church? And now, how do you speak to me? How do you receive me? Oh, God, oh, God, what pain you give me!"

He stamped his foot and exclaimed violently: "Ah, bosh! That's enough of it. I can't see you a moment without hearing all that foolery."

She had taken a step forward in order to bar the way, and quickly pulling out a handkerchief from her pocket, wiped her eyes with an abrupt movement. Her voice grew firmer by the effect of her will as she said in tones tremulous with pain: "No—I came to —to tell you some news—political news —to put you in the way of gaining fifty thousand francs—or even more—if you like."

He inquired, suddenly softened: "How so? What do you mean?"

"They are going to take possession of Morocco, but do not wish to let you know of it."

"Sit down," said George and sat down himself in an armchair. Then she drew toward him a low stool, and sitting down on it between his knees, went on in a coaxing tone: "As I am always thinking about you, I pay attention now to everything that is whispered around me."

And she began quietly to explain to him how she had guessed for some time past that something was being hatched unknown to him; that they were making use of him while dreading his coöperation.

At length, the day before, she had understood it all. It was a business transaction, a tremendous affair, hatched on the quiet. She smiled now, happy in her dexterity, and grew excited, speaking like a financier's wife accustomed to see the market manipulated, to see stocks rise and fall, ruining within two hours thousands of small investors who had placed their savings in undertakings guaranteed by the names of men honored and respected in the world of politics or finance.

She repeated: "Oh, it is a big thing that they have done. Very big. It was Walter who did it all, though, and he knows all about such things. Really it is a first-class job."

He grew impatient at these preliminaries and exclaimed: "Come, tell me what it is at once."

"Well, then, this is what it is. The Tangiers expedition was decided upon between them on the day that Laroche-Mathieu took the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, little by little, they have

bought up the whole of the Morocco loan, which had fallen to sixty-four or sixty-five francs. They bought it up very cleverly by means of shady brokers, who did not awaken any mistrust. They have even hoodwinked the Rothschilds, who were astonished to find Morocco stock always in demand, and who were answered by having agents pointed out to them—all stool pigeons. That quieted the big financiers. And now the expedition is to take place, and as soon as we are there, the French Government will guarantee the debt. Our friends will gain fifty or sixty millions. You understand the matter? You understand, too, how afraid they have been of every one, of the slightest indiscretion?"

She had leaned her head against the young fellow's waistcoat, and with her arms resting on his legs, pressed up against him, feeling that she was interesting him now, and ready to do anything for a caress, for a smile.

"You are quite certain?" he asked.

"I should think so," she replied with confidence.

"It is very smart, indeed. As to that swine of a Laroche-Mathieu, just see if I don't pay him out one of these days. Oh, the scoundrel! Just let him look out for himself. He shall go through my hands."

Then he began to reflect and went on: "We ought, though, to profit by all this."

"You can still buy some of the loan," said she; "it is only at seventy-two francs."

He said: "Yes, but I have no money under my hand."

She raised her eyes toward him, eyes full of entreaty, saying: "I have thought of that, and if you were very nice, you would let me lend you some."

He answered abruptly and almost harshly: "As to that, no indeed."

She murmured in an imploring voice: "Listen, there is something that you can do without borrowing money. I wanted to buy ten thousand francs' worth of the stock to make a little nest-egg. Well, I will take twenty thousand and you shall stand in for half. You understand that I am not going to hand the money over to Walter. So there is nothing to pay for the present. If it succeeds, you gain seventy thousand francs. If not, you will owe me ten thousand, which you can pay when you please."

He remarked: "No, I do not like such partnerships."

Then she argued, in order to get him to make up his mind. She proved to him that he was really pledging his word for ten thousand francs, that he was running risks, and that she was not advancing him anything, since the actual outlay was made by Walter's bank. She pointed out to him, besides, that it was he who had carried on in the *Vie Française* the whole of the political campaign that had rendered the scheme possible. He would be very foolish not to profit by it. He still hesitated, and she added: "But you reflect that in reality it is Walter who is advancing you these ten thousand francs, and that you have rendered him services worth a great deal more than that."

"Very well, then," said he, "I will go halves with you. If we lose, I will repay you the ten thousand francs."

She was so pleased that she took both his hands and began to kiss them eagerly. He repulsed her gently, saying:

"Come, be good now."

She looked at him disconsolately, saying: "Oh, George, can't I even kiss your hands?"

He replied: "No, not to-day. I have a headache, and it upsets me."

She sat down again and asked: "Will you come and dine with us to-morrow? It would give me such pleasure."

He hesitated, but dared not refuse, so said: "Certainly."

As he was leaving she stood very close to him, and one of her long black hairs caught in his waistcoat. She noticed it, and a wild idea crossed her mind, one of those superstitious notions which are often the whole of a woman's reason. She began to twist this hair gently round a button. Then she fastened another hair to the next button and a third to the next; one to every button. He would tear them out of her head presently when he turned to go, and hurt her. What happiness! And he would carry away something of her without knowing it, he would carry away a tiny lock of her hair which he had never yet asked for. It was a tie by which she attached him to her, a secret, invisible bond, a talisman she left with him.

He said all at once: "I must leave you, because I am expected at the Chamber at the close of the sitting. I cannot miss attending to-day."

She sighed, "Already," and then added, resignedly: "Go, dear, but you will come to dinner to-morrow." And suddenly she drew aside. There was a short and sharp pain in her head, as though needles had been stuck into the skin. Her heart throbbed, she was pleased to have suffered a little through him. "Good-by," said she.

After considerable reflection, Duroy called a messenger and sent the following note to Madame de Marelle: "I am going to entrust you with a commission for your husband. Tell him from me to buy to-morrow ten thousand francs' worth of the Morocco loan, which is quoted at seventy-two, and I promise him that he will gain from sixty to eighty thousand francs before three months are over. Charge him to observe the most absolute secrecy. Tell him from me that the expedition to Tangiers is decided on, and that the French Government will guarantee the Morocco loan. But do not mention it to a soul. It is a state secret that I am entrusting to you."

He walked down as far as the boulevard, and sauntering along stopped in front of a jeweler's shop to look at a chronometer which he had fancied for a long time back, and which was ticketed eighteen hundred francs. He thought all at once, with a thrill of joy in his heart: "If I gain my seventy thousand francs, I can afford it." And he began to think of all the things he would do with these seventy thousand francs. In the first place, he would get elected deputy. Then he would buy his chronometer and would speculate on the Bourse and would——

He did not want to go to the office, preferring to consult Madeleine before seeing Walter and writing his article, and started for home. He had reached the Rue Drouot, when he stopped short. He had forgotten to ask after the Comte de Vaudrec, who lived in the Chaussée d'Antin. He therefore turned back, still sauntering, thinking of a thousand things, mainly pleasant, of his

coming fortune.

He asked the concierge of the house in which the Comte de Vaudrec resided: "How is Monsieur de Vaudrec? I hear that he has been indisposed the last few days."

The man replied: "The count is very bad indeed, sir. They are afraid he will not live through the night; the gout has gone to his heart."

Duroy was so startled that he no longer knew what he ought to do. Vaudrec dying! Confused and disquieting ideas shot through his mind that he dared not even admit to himself. He stammered: "Thank you; I will call again," without knowing what he was saying. Then he jumped into a cab and was driven home. His wife had come in. He went into her room, breathless, and said at once: "Have you heard? Vaudrec is dying."

She was sitting down, reading a letter. She raised her eyes and repeated thrice: "Oh, what do you say, what do you say, what do you say?"

"I say that Vaudrec is dying from an attack of gout that has gone to the heart." Then he added: "What do you think of doing?"

She had risen, her face livid and her cheeks shaken by a nervous quivering. Then she began to cry terribly, hiding her face in her hands. She stood shaken by sobs and torn with grief. But suddenly she mastered her sorrow, and wiping her eyes, said: "I—I am going there—don't bother about me—I don't know when I shall be back—don't wait for me."

He replied: "Very well, dear." They shook hands and she went off so hurriedly that she forgot her gloves.

George, having dined alone, began to write his article. He did so exactly in accordance with the minister's instructions, giving his readers to understand that the expedition to Morocco would not take place. Then he took it to the office, chatted for a few minutes with the governor, and went out smoking, light-hearted, though he knew not why. His wife had not come home, and he went to bed and fell asleep.

Madeleine came in toward midnight. George, suddenly aroused, sat up in bed. "Well?" he asked.

He had never seen her so pale and so deeply moved. She murmured: "He is dead."

"Ah—and he did not say anything?"

"Nothing. He had lost consciousness when I arrived."

George was thinking. Questions rose to his lips that he did not dare to put. "Come to bed," said he.

She undressed rapidly and slipped into bed beside him, when he resumed: "Were there any relatives present at his death-bed?"

"Only a nephew."

"Ah! Did he see this nephew often?"

"Never. They had not met for ten years."

"Had he any other relatives?"

"No, I do not think so."

"Then it is this nephew who will inherit?"

"I do not know."

"He was very well off, Vaudrec?"

"Yes, very well off."

"Do you know what his fortune was?"

"No, not exactly. One or two millions, perhaps."

He said no more. She blew out the light, and they remained, side by side, in the darkness—silent, wakeful and re-

flecting. He no longer felt inclined for sleep. He now thought the seventy thousand francs promised by Madame Walter insignificant. Suddenly he fancied that Madeleine was crying. He inquired, in order to make certain: "Are you asleep?"

"No."

Her voice was tearful and quavering, and he said: "I forgot to tell you when I came in that your minister has played us a nice trick."

"How so?"

He told her at length, with all details, the scheme hatched between Laroche-Mathieu and Walter. When he had finished she asked: "How do you know this?"

He replied: "You will excuse me not telling you. You have your means of information, which I do not seek to penetrate. I have mine, which I wish to keep to myself. I can, in any case, answer for the correctness of my information."

Then she murmured: "Yes, it is quite possible. I fancied they were up to something without us."

But George, who no longer felt sleepy, had drawn closer to his wife, and gently kissed her ear. She repulsed him sharply: "I beg of you to leave me alone. I am not in a mood for fooling." He turned resignedly toward the wall, and, having closed his eyes, ended by falling asleep.

CHAPTER XIV

A TESTIMONY OF REGARD

The church was draped with black, and over the main entrance a huge coat-of-arms, surmounted by a coronet, announced to the passers-by that a nobleman was being buried. The ceremony was just over, and those present at it were slowly dispersing, defiling past the coffin and the nephew of the Comte de Vaudrec, who was now shaking hands and returning bows. When George Duroy and his wife came out of the church they began to walk homeward side by side, silent and preoccupied. At length George said, as though speaking to himself: "Really, it is very strange."

"What, dear?" asked Madeleine.

"That Vaudrec should not have left us anything."

She blushed suddenly, as though a rosy veil had been cast over her white skin, and said: "Why should he leave us anything? There was no reason why he should do so." Then, after a few moments' silence, she went on: "There is, perhaps, a will in the hands of some notary. We know nothing as yet."

He reflected for a short time and then murmured: "Yes, it is probable, for, after all, he was the most intimate friend of both of us. He dined with us twice a week, called at all hours, and was at home at our place, quite at home in every respect. He loved you like a father, and had no children, no brothers and sisters, nothing but a nephew, and a nephew he never used to

see. Yes, there must be a will. I do not care for much, only a remembrance to show that he thought of us, that he loved us, that he recognized the affection that we felt for him. He certainly owed us some such mark of friendship."

She said in a pensive and indifferent manner: "It is possible, indeed, that there may be a will."

As they entered their rooms the man servant handed a letter to Madeleine. She opened it and then held it out to her husband. It ran as follows:

Office of Maître Lamaneur, Notary,
17 Rue des Vosges.

Madame: I have the honor to beg you to call at my office on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, between the hours of two and four, on business that concerns you. I am, etc.,

LAMANEUR.

George had reddened in turn. "That is what it must be," said he. "It is strange, though, that it is you who are summoned, and not myself, who am legally the head of the family."

She did not answer at once, but after a brief period of reflection said: "Shall we go round there by and by?"

"Yes, certainly."

They set out as soon as they had lunched. When they entered Maître Lamaneur's office, the head clerk rose with marked attention and ushered them into the lawyer's private office. The notary was a round little man, round all over. His head looked like a ball almost nailed on to another ball, resting on short little legs that almost resembled balls, too. He bowed, pointed to two chairs, and, turning toward Madeleine, said:

"Madame, I have sent for you in order to acquaint you with the will of the Comte de Vaudrec, in which you are interested."

George could not help muttering: "I thought so."

The notary went on: "I will read to you the document, which is very brief."

He took a paper from a box in front of him and read as follows:

"I, the undersigned, Paul Emile Cyprien Gontran, Comte de Vaudrec, being sound in body and mind, hereby express my last wishes. As death may overtake us at any moment, and foreseeing this event, I wish to take the precaution of making my will, which will be placed in the hands of Maître Lamaneur. Having no direct heirs, I leave the whole of my fortune, consisting of stock to the amount of six hundred thousand francs and landed property worth about five hundred thousand francs, to Madame Claire Madeleine Duroy, without any charge or condition. I beg her to accept this gift of a departed friend as the proof of a deep, devoted and respectful affection."

The notary added: "That is all. This document is dated last August and replaces one of the same nature, written two years back, with the name of Madame Claire Madeleine Forestier. I have this first will, too, which would prove, in the case of opposition on the part of the family, that the Comte de Vaudrec did not change his mind."

Madeleine, very pale, looked at her feet. George nervously twisted the end of his mustache between his fingers. The notary continued, after a moment of silence: "It is of course understood,

sir, that your wife cannot accept the legacy without your consent."

Duroy rose and said dryly: "I must ask time to reflect."

The notary, who was smiling, bowed, and said in an amiable tone: "I understand the scruples that cause you to hesitate, sir. I should say that the nephew of Monsieur de Vaudrec, who became acquainted this very morning with his uncle's last wishes, stated that he was prepared to respect them, provided the sum of a hundred thousand francs was allowed him. In my opinion the will is unassailable, but a lawsuit would cause a stir which it may perhaps suit you to avoid. The world often judges things ill-naturedly. In any case, can you give me your answer on all these points before Saturday?"

George bowed, saying: "Yes, sir."

Then he bowed again ceremoniously, ushered out his wife, who had remained silent, and went out himself with so stiff an air that the notary no longer smiled.

As soon as they got home Duroy abruptly closed the door, and, throwing his hat on the bed, said:

"You were more than a mere friend to Vaudrec."

Madeleine, who was taking off her veil, turned round with a start, exclaiming: "I? Oh!"

"Yes, you. A man does not leave the whole of his fortune to a woman, unless——"

She was trembling and was unable to remove the pins fastening the transparent tissue. After a moment's reflection she stammered in an agitated tone: "Come, come—you are mad—you are —you are. Did not you yourself, just now, have hopes that he would leave us something?"

George remained standing beside her, following all her emotions like a magistrate seeking to note the least hesitation on the part of an accused. He said, laying stress on every word: "Yes, he might have left something to me, your husband—to me, his friend—you understand, but not to you—my wife. The distinction is capital, essential from the point of propriety and of public opinion."

Madeleine in turn looked at him fixedly in the eyes, in a penetrating and singular fashion, as though seeking to read something there, as though trying to discover that unknown part of a human being which we never fathom and of which we can scarcely even catch rapid glimpses at moments which are like doors left open, revealing the mysterious depths of the mind. She said slowly: "It seems to me, however, that a legacy of this importance would have been looked on as at least equally strange left to you."

He asked abruptly: "Why so?"

She said: "Because——" hesitated, and then continued: "Because you are my husband and have only known him for a short time, after all—because I have been his friend for a very long while—and because his first will, made during Forestier's lifetime, was already in my favor."

George began to stride up and down. He said: "You cannot accept."

She replied in a tone of indifference: "Precisely so. Then it is not worth while waiting till Saturday; we can let Maître Lamaneur know at once."

He stopped short in front of her, and they again stood for some moments with their eyes riveted on each other, striv-

ing to fathom the impenetrable secret of their hearts, to cut down to the quick of their thoughts.

They tried to see one another's conscience unveiled in an ardent and mute interrogation; the struggle of two beings who, living side by side, were always ignorant of one another, suspecting, sniffing round, watching, but never understanding one another to the muddy depths of their souls. And suddenly he muttered to her face in a low voice: "Come, tell me the whole story of your friendship with De Vaudrec."

She shrugged her shoulders, saying: "Vaudrec was very fond of me, very—but there was nothing more—never."

He stamped his foot. "You lie. It is not possible."

She replied quietly: "It is so, though."

He began to walk up and down again, and then, halting once more, said: "Explain, then, how he came to leave the whole of his fortune to you."

She did so in a careless and disinterested tone, saying: "It is quite simple. As you said just now, he had only ourselves for friends, or rather myself, for he has known me from a child. My mother was a companion at the house of some relatives of his. He was always coming here, and as he had no natural heirs, he thought of me. That there was a little love for me in the matter is possible. But where is the woman who has not been loved thus? Why should not such secret, hidden affection have placed my name at the tip of his pen when he thought of expressing his last wishes? He brought me flowers every Monday. You were not at all astonished at that, and yet he did not bring you any, did he? Now he has given me his fortune for the same reason, and because he had no one to offer it to. It would have been, on the contrary, very surprising for him to have left it to you. Why should he have done so? What were you to him?"

She spoke so naturally and quietly that George hesitated. He said, however: "All the same, we cannot accept this inheritance under such conditions. The effect would be deplorable. All the world would believe it, all the world would gossip about it and laugh at me. My fellow journalists are already only too disposed to feel jealous of me and to attack me. I should have, before any one, a care for my honor and my reputation. It is impossible for me to allow my wife to accept a legacy of this kind. Forestier might perhaps have tolerated it, but not I."

She murmured mildly: "Well, dear, do not let us accept. It will be a million the less in our pockets, that is all."

He was still walking up and down, and began to think aloud, speaking for his wife's benefit, without addressing himself directly to her: "Yes, a million; so much the worse. He did not understand, in making his will, what a fault in tact, what a breach of propriety he was committing. He did not see in what a false, a ridiculous position he would place me. Everything is a matter of detail in this life. He should have left me half, that would have settled everything."

He sat down, crossed his legs and began to twist the end of his mustache, as he did in moments of boredom, uneasiness and difficult reflection. Madeleine took up some embroidery at which she worked from time to time, and said, while selecting her wools: "I have only

to hold my tongue. It is for you to reflect."

He was a long time without replying and then said hesitatingly: "The world will never understand that Vaudrec made you his sole heiress and that I allowed it. Do you understand now how our acceptance of it would be interpreted? It would be necessary to find a side issue, some clever way of palliating matters. To let it go abroad, for instance, that he had divided the money between us, leaving half to the husband and half to the wife."

She observed: "I do not see how that can be done, since the will is plain."

"Oh! it is very simple. You could leave me half the inheritance by a deed of gift. We have no children, so it is feasible. In that way the mouth of public malevolence would be closed."

She replied somewhat impatiently: "I do not see any the more how the mouth of public malevolence is to be closed, since the will is there, signed by Vaudrec."

He said angrily: "Have we any need to show it and to paste it upon the walls? You are really stupid. We will say that the Comte de Vaudrec left his fortune between us. That is all. But you cannot accept this legacy without my authorization. I will only give it on condition of a division, which will hinder me from becoming a laughing stock."

She looked at him again with a penetrating glance and said: "As you like. I am willing."

Then he rose and began to walk up and down again. He seemed to be hesitating anew and now avoided his wife's penetrating glance. He was saying: "No, certainly not. Perhaps it would be better to give it up altogether. That is more worthy, more correct, more honorable. And yet by this plan nothing could be imagined against us—absolutely nothing. The most scrupulous people could have nothing to say." He paused in front of Madeleine. "Well, then, if you like, darling, I will go back alone to Maître Lamaneur to explain matters to him and consult him. I will tell him of my scruples and add that we have decided on dividing the fortune to prevent gossip. From the moment that I accept half this inheritance, it is plain that no one has the right to smile. It is equal to saying aloud: 'My wife accepts because I accept, I, her husband, the best judge of what she may do without compromising herself.' Otherwise a scandal would have arisen."

Madeleine merely murmured: "Just as you like."

He went on with a flow of words: "Yes, it is all as clear as daylight with this arrangement of dividing it in halves. We inherit from a friend who did not want to make any difference between us—any distinction; who did not wish to appear to say: 'I preferred one or the other after death, as I did during life.' He liked the wife best, be it understood, but in leaving the fortune to both, he wished plainly to express that his preference was purely platonic. And you may be sure that, if he had thought of it, that is what he would have done. He did not reflect. He did not foresee the consequences. As you said very appropriately just now, it was you to whom he offered flowers every week; it is to you that he wished to leave his last remembrance, without taking into consideration that——"

She checked him with a shade of irritation: "All right; I understand. You

have no need to make so many explanations. Go to the notary's at once."

He stammered, reddening: "You are right. I am off."

He took his hat, and then, at the moment of going out, said: "I will try to settle the difficulty with the nephew for fifty thousand francs, eh?"

She replied with dignity: "No, give him the hundred thousand francs he asks. Take them from my share if you like."

He muttered shamefacedly: "Oh, no; we will share that. Giving up fifty thousand francs apiece, there still remains to us a clear million." He added: "Good-by, then, for the present, Maisie." And he went off to explain to the notary the partnership, which he asserted had been thought out by his wife.

They signed the next day a deed of gift of five hundred thousand francs, which Madeleine Duroy abandoned to her husband. On leaving the notary's office, as the day was fine, George suggested that they should walk as far as the boulevards. He showed himself pleasant and full of attention and affection. He laughed, pleased at everything, while she remained thoughtful and somewhat severe.

It was a somewhat cool autumn day. The people in the streets seemed in a hurry and walked rapidly. Duroy led his wife to the front of the shop in which he had so often gazed at the longed-for chronometer. "Shall I buy you some jewelry?" said he.

She replied indifferently: "Just as you like."

They went in and he asked: "What would you prefer—a necklace, a bracelet or a pair of earrings?"

The sight of the trinkets in gold and precious stones overcame her studied coolness, and she scanned with kindling and inquisitive eyes the glass cases filled with jewelry. And, suddenly moved by desire, she said: "That is a very pretty bracelet."

It was a chain of quaint pattern, every link of which had a different stone set in it.

George inquired: "How much is this bracelet?"

"Three thousand francs, sir," replied the jeweler.

"If you will let me have it for two thousand five hundred it is a bargain."

The man hesitated and then replied: "No, sir, that is impossible."

Duroy went on: "Come, you can throw in that chronometer for fifteen hundred; that will make four thousand, which I will pay at once. Is it agreed? If not, I will go somewhere else."

The jeweler, in a state of perplexity, ended by agreement, saying: "Very good, sir."

And the journalist, after giving his address, added:

"You will have the monogram, G. R. C., engraved on the chronometer under a baron's coronet."

Madeleine, surprised, began to smile, and when they went out took his arm with a certain affection. She found him really clever and capable. Now that he had an income, he needed a title. It was quite right.

The jeweler bowed them out, saying: "You can depend upon me; it will be ready on Thursday, baron."

They paused before the Vaudeville, at which a new piece was being played.

"If you like," said he, "we will go to the theatre this evening. Let us see if we can get a box."

They took a box and he continued: "Suppose we dine at a restaurant?"

"Oh! yes, I should like that."

He was happy as a king and sought what else they could do. "Suppose we go and ask Madame de Marelle to spend the evening with us. Her husband is at home, I hear, and I shall be delighted to see him."

They went there. George, who slightly dreaded the meeting, was not ill pleased that his wife was present to prevent anything like an explanation. But Clotilde did not seem to remember anything against him, and even obliged her husband to accept the invitation.

The dinner was good and the evening pleasant. George and Madeleine got home late. The gas was out, and to light them upstairs the journalist struck a wax match from time to time. On reaching the first floor landing, the flame, suddenly starting forth as he struck, caused their two reflections to show in the glass standing out against the darkness of the staircase. They resembled phantoms, appearing suddenly and ready to vanish into the night.

Duroy raised his hand to light up their reflections and said, with a laugh of triumph: "Behold the millionaires!"

CHAPTER XV

LITTLE SUSAN COMES FORWARD

The conquest of Morocco had been accomplished two months back.

France, mistress of Tangiers, held the whole of the African shore of the Mediterranean as far as Tripoli and had guaranteed the debt of the newly annexed territory. It was said that two ministers had gained a score of millions over the business, and Laroche-Mathieu was almost openly named. As to Walter, no one in Paris was ignorant of the fact that he had brought down two birds with one stone and made thirty or forty millions out of the loan and eight to ten millions out of the copper and iron mines, as well as out of a large stretch of territory bought for almost nothing prior to the conquest and sold after the French occupation to companies formed to promote colonization. He had become in a few days one of the lords of creation, one of those omnipotent financiers more powerful than monarchs, who cause heads to bow, mouths to stammer and all that is base, cowardly and envious to well up from the depths of the human heart. He was no longer the Jew Walter. He was Monsieur Walter, the wealthy Israelite.

He wished it to be known. Aware of the monetary embarrassments of the Prince de Carlsbourg, who owned one of the finest mansions in the Rue de Faubourg Saint Honoré, with a garden opening on the Champs Elysées, he proposed to him to buy his house and furniture, just as it stood, within twenty-four hours. He offered three millions, and the prince, tempted by the amount, accepted. The following day Walter in-

stalled himself in his new domicile. Then he had another idea, the idea of a conqueror who wishes to conquer Paris, the idea of a Bonaparte. The whole city was flocking at that moment to see a great painting by the Hungarian artist, Karl Marcowitch, exhibited at a dealer's named Jacques Lenoble, and representing Christ walking on the water. The art critics, filled with enthusiasm, declared this picture the most superb masterpiece of the century. Walter bought it for four hundred thousand francs and took it away, thus cutting suddenly short the flow of public curiosity and forcing the whole of Paris to speak of him in terms of envy, blame or approbation. Then he had it announced in the newspapers that he would invite every one known in Paris society to view at his house some evening this triumph of the foreign master, in order that it might not be said that he had hidden away a work of art. His house would be open, let those who would come. It would be enough to show at the door the letter of invitation.

This ran as follows: "Monsieur and Madame Walter beg of you to honor them with your company on December 30, between nine and twelve P. M., to view the picture by Karl Marcowitch, 'Jesus Walking on the Waters,' illuminated by electric light." Then, as a postscript, in small letters: "Dancing after midnight." So those who wished to stay might do so, and out of these the Walters would recruit their future acquaintances. The others would view the picture, the mansion and their owners with worldly curiosity, insolent and indifferent, and would then go away as they came. But Daddy Walter knew very well that they would return later on, as they had done in the case of his Israelite brethren, grown rich like himself. The main thing was that they should enter his house, all these titled paupers who were mentioned in the papers, and they would enter it to see the face of a man who had gained fifty millions in six weeks; they would enter it to see and note who else came there; they would also enter it because he had had the good taste and dexterity to summon them to admire a Christian picture at the home of a child of Israel.

Duroy was furious at his chief's triumph. He had thought himself rich with the half million francs extorted from his wife, and now he considered himself to be poor, fearfully poor, when comparing his modest fortune with the shower of millions that had fallen around him, without his being able to pick any of it up. He was angry with every one; with his wife, who, deceived by Laroche-Mathieu, had persuaded him not to invest in the Morocco loan; and, above all, with the minister who had tricked him, who had made use of him and who dined at his table twice a week. Laroche-Mathieu now reigned in the Duroy household, having taken the place and the days of the Comte de Vaudrec, and spoke to the servants like a second master. George tolerated him with a quiver running through him like a dog who wants to bite and dares not.

He had declared at first that he would not go to his chief's entertainment and that he would never more set foot in his house. For two months Madame Walter had been writing letters, begging him to come whenever he liked, in order, she said, that she might hand over the seventy thousand francs she had gained for him. He did not reply and

threw these into the fire. Not that he had renounced receiving his share of their profits, but he wanted to madden her, to treat her with contempt. She was too rich. He wanted to show his pride. The very day of the exhibition of the picture, as Madeleine pointed out to him that he was very wrong not to go, he replied: "Leave me in peace. I shall stay at home."

Then, after dinner, he suddenly said: "It will be better, after all, to undergo this infliction. Get dressed at once."

She was expecting this and said: "I will be ready in a quarter of an hour."

He dressed, growling, and even in the cab he continued to vent his anger.

The courtyard of the Carlsbourg mansion was illuminated by four electric lights, looking like four small bluish moons, one at each corner. A splendid carpet was laid down the high flight of steps, on each of which a footman in livery stood motionless as a statue.

Duroy muttered: "Here is a fine splurge for you," and shrugged his shoulders, his heart filled with jealousy.

His wife said: "Keep still and do as much yourself!"

They went in and handed their wraps to the footmen, who advanced to meet them.

The reception rooms were already crowded. Most of the ladies were in outdoor dress to show that they came there as to any other exhibition. Those who intended remaining for the ball were in low-necked dresses. Madame Walter, surrounded by her friends, was in the second room, acknowledging the greetings of the visitors. Many of these did not know her, and walked about as though in a museum, without troubling themselves about the masters of the house. When she perceived Duroy she remained motionless, awaiting Duroy. He greeted her ceremoniously, while Madeleine overwhelmed her with affection and compliments. Then George left his wife with her and lost himself in the crowd, to listen to the spiteful things that assuredly must be said.

George recognized some well-known people—the Duchess de Ferracine, the Count and Countess de Ravenel, General Prince d'Andremont, the beautiful Marchioness des Dunes and all those folks who are seen at first performances. He was suddenly seized by the arm and a young and pleased voice murmured in his ear: "Ah! here you are at last, you naughty Bel-Ami. How is it one no longer sees you?"

It was Susan Walter, scanning him with her enamel-like eyes from beneath the curly cloud of her fair hair. He was delighted to see her again and frankly pressed her hand. Then, excusing himself, he said: "I have not been able to come. I have had so much to do during the past two months that I have not been out at all."

She said with a serious air: "That is wrong, very wrong. You have caused us a great deal of sorrow, for we adore you, mamma and I. As to myself, I cannot get on without you. When you are not here I am bored to death. You see, I tell you so plainly, so that you may no longer have the right to disappear like that. Give me your arm, I will show you 'Jesus Walking on the Waters' myself; it is right at the end, beyond the conservatory. Papa had it put there so that they should be obliged to see everything before they could get to it. It is astonishing how proud papa is of this place."

They went on quietly among the

crowd. People turned round to look at this good-looking fellow and this charming little doll. A well-known painter said:

"What a pretty pair! They go capitally together."

George was thinking: "If I had been really clever, this is the girl I should have married. I could have done it. How is it I did not think of it? How did I come to take that other one? What a piece of stupidity! We always act too impetuously and never reflect sufficiently."

Susan was saying: "Oh! do come often, Bel-Ami; we will go in for all sorts of extravagances, now papa is so rich. We will amuse ourselves like madcaps."

He answered, still following up his idea: "Oh! you will marry now. I will give you six months before you are caught with that same bait. You will be a marchioness, a duchess or a princess, and will look down on me from a very great height, miss."

She grew indignant, tapped him on the arm with her fan and vowed that she would marry according to the dictates of her heart.

He sneered: "We shall see about that; you are too rich."

She remarked: "But you, too, have come in for an inheritance."

He uttered in a tone of contempt: "Oh! not worth speaking about. Scarcely twenty thousand francs a year. Not much in these days."

"But your wife has also inherited."

"Yes. A million between us. Forty thousand francs income. We cannot even keep a carriage on it."

They had reached the last of the reception rooms, and before them lay the conservatory—a huge winter garden full of tall, tropical trees, sheltering clumps of rare flowers. They walked on carpets exactly like moss, between two thick rows of shrubs. All at once Duroy noticed on his left, under a wide dome of palms, a broad basin of white marble, large enough to bathe in, on the edge of which four large Delft swans poured forth water through their open beaks. The bottom of the basin was strewn with golden sand, and swimming about in it were enormous goldfish, quaint Chinese monsters, with projecting eyes and scales edged with blue, mandarins of the waters who recalled, thus suspended above this gold-colored ground, the quaint embroideries of the Flowery Land. The journalist halted with beating heart. He said to himself: "Here is luxury. These are the houses in which one ought to live. Others have attained it. Why should not I?"

He thought of methods of doing so; did not find them at once, and grew irritated at his powerlessness. His companion, somewhat thoughtful, did not speak. He looked at her sideways and again thought: "All that was necessary was to have married this little puppet."

But Susan all at once seemed to wake up. "Attention!" said she; and pushing George through a group which barred their way, she made him turn sharply to the right. They were now in front of the painting. It was the powerful and unexpected work of a master, one of those works which stir the mind and give you something to dream of for years. People who look at such things at the outset remain silent and then go thoughtfully away and only speak later on of the worth of the painting.

Duroy, having contemplated it for

some time, said: "It is nice to be able to afford such trifles."

But as he was pushed against by others coming to see it, he went away, still keeping on his arm Susan's little hand, which he squeezed slightly. She said: "Would you like a glass of champagne? Come to the refreshment buffet. We shall find papa there."

And they slowly passed back through the rooms in which the crowd was increasing, noisy and at home, the fashionable crowd of a public fête. George all at once thought he heard a voice say: "It is Laroche-Mathieu and Madame Duroy." These words flitted past his ear like those distant sounds borne by the wind. Whence came they? He looked about on all sides, and indeed saw his wife passing by on the minister's arm. They were chatting intimately in a low tone, smiling, and with their eyes fixed on one another's.

They reached the dining-room—an immense apartment, with marble columns and walls hung with old tapestry. Walter perceived his descriptive writer and darted forward to take him by the hands. He was intoxicated with joy. "Have you seen everything? Have you shown him everything, Susan? What a lot of people, eh, Bel-Ami! Did you see the Prince de Guerche? He came and drank a glass of punch here just now," he exclaimed.

Then he darted toward the Senator Rissolin, who was towing along his wife, bewildered and bedecked like a stall at a fair. A gentleman bowed to Susan, a tall, thin fellow, slightly bald, with yellow whiskers and that air of good breeding which is everywhere recognizable. George heard his name mentioned, the Marquis de Cazolles, and became suddenly jealous of him. How long had she known him? Since her accession to wealth, no doubt. He divined a suitor.

He was taken by the arm. It was Norbert de Varenne. The old poet was airing his long hair and worn dress coat with a weary and indifferent air.

He had a glass filled for himself, and, bowing to Duroy, who had taken another, said: "I drink to the triumph of wit over wealth." Then he added softly:

"Not that wealth on the part of others hurts me, or that I am angry at it. But I protest on principle."

George no longer listened to him. He was looking for Susan, who had just disappeared with the Marquis de Cazolles, and, abruptly quitting Norbert de Varenne, set out in pursuit of the young girl. A dense crowd in quest of refreshments checked him. When he at length made his way through it, he found himself face to face with the De Marelles. He had not for some time past met the husband, who seized both his hands, saying:

"How can I thank you, my dear fellow, for the advice you gave me through Clotilde? I have gained close on a hundred thousand francs over the Morocco loan. It is to you I owe them. You are a valuable friend."

Several men turned round to look at the pretty and elegant brunette. Duroy replied: "In exchange for that service, my dear fellow, I am going to take your wife, or rather to offer her my arm. Husband and wife are best apart, you know."

Monsieur de Marelle bowed, saying: "You are quite right. If I lose you, we will meet here in an hour."

"Exactly."

The pair plunged into the crowd, fol-

lowed by the husband. Clotilde kept saying: "How lucky these Walters are! That is what it is to have business intelligence."

George replied: "Bah! Clever men always make a position one way or another."

She said: "Here are two girls who will have from twenty to thirty millions apiece. Without reckoning that Susan is pretty."

He said nothing. His own idea coming from another's mouth irritated him. She had not yet seen the picture of "Jesus Walking on the Waters," and he proposed to take her to it. They amused themselves by talking scandal of the people they recognized and making fun of those they did not. Saint-Potin passed by, bearing on the lapel of his coat a number of decorations, which greatly amused them. An ex-ambassador following him showed far fewer.

Duroy remarked: "What a mixed salad of society."

Boisrenard, who shook hands with him, had also adorned his buttonhole with the green and yellow ribbon worn on the day of the duel.

But, on passing through the greenhouse, he noticed his wife seated beside Laroche-Mathieu, both almost hidden behind a clump of plants. It appeared as if they were saying: "We have appointed a meeting here, a meeting in public. For we do not care a rap what people think."

Madame de Marelle agreed that the Jesus of Karl Marcowitch was astounding, and they retraced their steps.

Susan seized on them as they passed through a doorway, exclaiming: "Ah! here you are. Well, pretty boy, you must remain alone. I am going to take away Clotilde to show her my room."

The two moved rapidly away, gliding through the throng with that undulating, snakelike motion women know how to adopt in a crowd. Almost immediately a voice murmured: "George."

It was Madame Walter, who went on in a low tone:

"Oh! how you do make me suffer without reason. I told Susan to get your companion away in order to be able to say a word to you. Listen, I must speak to you this evening, I must, or you don't know what I will do. Go into the conservatory. You will find a door on the left leading out into the garden. Follow the path in front of it. At the end of it you will find an arbor. Wait for me there in ten minutes' time. If you won't, I declare to you that I will create a scene here at once."

He replied loftily: "Very well. I will be at the spot you mention within ten minutes."

And they separated. But Jacques Rival almost made him late. He had taken him by the arm and was telling him a lot of things in a very excited manner. He slowly went along the walk, seeing his way with difficulty after coming out of the bright light of the reception room. He could distinguish to the right and left leafless shrubs, the little branches of which were quivering. Light filtered through their branches, coming from the windows of the mansion.

He saw something white in the middle of the path in front of him, and Madame Walter, with bare arms and neck, said in a quivering voice: "Ah! here you are; you want to kill me, then?"

He answered quietly: "No melo-

dramatics, I beg of you, or I shall bolt at once."

She had seized his arms, and with her lips close to his, said: "But what have I done to you? You are behaving toward me like a wretch. What have I done to you?"

He tried to repulse her. "You wound your hair round every one of my buttons last time I saw you, and it almost brought about a rupture between my wife and myself."

She was surprised for a moment, and then, shaking her head, said: "Oh! your wife would not mind. It was some one else who made a scene over it."

He looked at her with astonishment. She was no longer the big, frolicsome tomboy he had known, but a bewildered, desperate woman, capable of anything. A vague project, however, arose in his mind. He replied: "My dear, love is not eternal. We meet and leave one another. But when it drags on it becomes a terrible bore. I will have no more of it. That is the truth. However, if you can be reasonable, and receive and treat me as a friend, I will come as I used to. Do you feel capable of that?"

She murmured: "I am capable of anything in order to see you."

"Then it is agreed on," said he; "we are friends and nothing more."

She stammered: "It is agreed on"; and then, holding out her lips to him: "One more kiss; the last."

He refused gently, saying: "No, we must keep to our agreement."

She turned aside, wiping away a couple of tears, and then, drawing from her bosom a bundle of papers, offered it to Duroy, saying: "Here, it is your share of the profit in the Morocco affair. I was so pleased to have gained it for you. Here, take it."

He wanted to refuse, observing: "No, I will not take that money."

Then she grew indignant. "Ah! so you won't take it now. It is yours, yours only. If you do not take it, I will throw it into the gutter. You won't act like that, George?"

He received the little bundle and slipped it into his pocket.

"We must go in," said he; "you will catch cold."

She murmured: "So much the better, if I could die."

She took one of his hands, kissed it passionately, with rage and despair, and fled toward the house. He returned, quietly reflecting. Then he reëntered the conservatory with haughty forehead and smiling lip. His wife and Laroche-Mathieu were no longer there. The crowd was thinning. It was becoming evident that they would not stay for the dance. He perceived Susan arm in arm with her sister. They both came toward him to ask him to dance the first quadrille with the Comte de Latour-Yvelin.

He was astonished and asked: "Who is he?"

Susan answered maliciously: "A new friend of my sister's."

Rose blushed and murmured: "You are very spiteful, Susan; he is no more my friend than yours."

Duroy familiarly took Susan by the elbow and said in his caressing voice: "Listen, my dear, you believe me to be your friend?"

"Yes, Bel-Ami."

"You have confidence in me?"

"Perfect confidence."

"Well, then, will you promise me one thing?"

"Yes; but what is it?"

"To consult me every time that your hand is asked for, and not to accept any one without taking my advice."

"Very well."

"And to keep this a secret between us two. Not a word of it to your father or your mother."

"Not a word."

"It is a promise, then?"

"It is a promise."

Rival came up with a bustling air. "Mademoiselle, your papa wants you for the dance."

She said: "Come along, Bel-Ami."

But he refused, having made up his mind to leave at once, wishing to be alone in order to think. Too many new ideas had entered his mind, and he began to look for his wife. In a short time he saw her drinking chocolate at the buffet with two gentlemen unknown to him. She introduced her husband without mentioning their names to him. After a few moments he said:

"Shall we go?"

"Whenever you please."

She took his arm and they walked back through the reception rooms, in which the public were growing few. She said: "Where is Madame Walter? I should like to wish her good-by."

"It is better not. She would try to keep us for the ball, and I have had enough of this."

"That is so; you are quite right."

All the way home they were silent. But as soon as they were in their room, Madeleine said smilingly, before even taking off her veil: "I have a surprise for you."

He growled ill-temperedly: "What is it?"

"Guess."

"I will make no such effort."

"Well, the day after to-morrow is the 1st of January."

"Yes."

"The time for New Year's gifts."

"Yes."

"Here's one for you that Laroche-Mathieu gave me just now."

She gave him a little black box resembling a jewel case. He opened it indifferently and saw the cross of the Legion of Honor. He grew somewhat pale and then smiled and said: "I should have preferred ten millions. That did not cost him much." She had expected an outburst of joy, and was irritated at this coolness. "You are really incredible. Nothing satisfies you now," said she.

He replied tranquilly: "That man is only paying his debt, and he still owes me a great deal."

She was astonished at his tone and resumed: "It is, though, a big thing at your age."

He remarked: "All things are relative. I could have something bigger now."

He had taken the case, and placing it on the mantelshelf, looked for some moments at the glittering star it contained. Then he closed it and went to bed, shrugging his shoulders.

The *Journal Officiel* of the 1st of January announced the nomination of Monsieur Prosper-George du Roy, journalist, to the dignity of chevalier of the Legion of Honor for special services. The name was written in two words, which gave George more pleasure than the decoration itself.

An hour after having read this piece of news, he received a note from Madame Walter, begging him to come and dine with her that evening with his wife, to celebrate his new honors. He hesitated for a few moments and

then, throwing this note, written in ambiguous terms, into the fire, said to Madeleine: "We are going to dinner at the Walters' this evening."

She was astonished. "Why, I thought you never wanted to set foot in the house again."

He only remarked: "I have changed my mind."

When they arrived Madame Walter was alone in the little Louis XVI. boudoir she had appropriated to the reception of personal friends. Dressed in black, with her powdered hair, she looked charming.

She had the air at a distance of an old woman and close at hand of a young one, and when one looked at her well of a pretty snare for the eyes.

"You are in mourning?" inquired Madeleine.

She replied sadly: "Yes and no. I have not lost any relatives. But I have reached the age when one wears the mourning of one's life. I wear it to-day to inaugurate it. In future I shall wear it in my heart."

Duroy thought: "Will this resolution last?"

The dinner was somewhat dull. Susan alone chattered incessantly. Rose seemed preoccupied. The journalist was warmly congratulated. During the evening they strolled, chatting, through the reception rooms and the conservatory. As Duroy was walking behind the rest with Madame Walter, she held him back by the arm.

"Listen," said she in a low voice: "I will never speak to you of anything again, never. But come and see me, George. It is impossible for me to live without you, impossible."

He answered quietly: "I understand. It is useless to speak of all that again. You see, I came here to-day, at once, on receiving your letter."

Walter, who had walked on in advance with his two daughters and Madeleine, was waiting for Duroy beside the picture of "Jesus Walking on the Waters."

"Just imagine," said he, laughing, "I found my wife yesterday on her knees before this picture, as if in a chapel. She was paying her devotions."

Madame Walter replied in a firm voice—a voice thrilling with secret exultation: "It is that Christ who will save my soul. He gives me strength and courage every time I look at Him." And, pausing in front of the Divinity standing amid the waters, she murmured: "How handsome He is. How afraid of Him those men are and yet how they love Him. Look at His head, His eyes, how simple, and yet how supernatural at the same time."

Susan exclaimed: "But He resembles you, Bel-Ami. I am sure He resembles you. If you had a beard, or if He were clean shaven, you would be both alike. Oh! but it is striking!"

She insisted on his standing beside the picture, and they all, indeed, recognized that the two faces resembled one another. Every one was astonished. Walter thought it very singular. Madeleine, smiling, declared that Jesus had a more manly air. Madame Walter stood motionless, gazing fixedly at the face of Duroy beside the face of Christ.

CHAPTER XVI

IN FLAGRANTE DELICTU

DURING the remainder of the winter the Duroys often visited the Walters. George even dined there by himself continually, Madeleine saying that she was tired and preferred to remain at home. He had adopted Friday as a regular day, and Madame Walter never invited any one that evening; it belonged to Bel-Ami, to him alone. After dinner they played cards and fed the goldfish, amusing themselves like a family circle. Toward the end of March the marriage of the two sisters was all at once alluded to. Rose, it was said, was to marry the Comte de Latour-Yvelin and Susan the Marquis de Cazolles. These two gentlemen had become familiars of the household, those familiars to whom special favors and marked privileges are granted. George and Susan continued to live in a species of free and fraternal intimacy, romping for hours, making fun of every one, and seeming greatly to enjoy one another's company. They had never spoken again of the possible marriage of the young girl nor of the suitors who offered themselves.

Mr. Walter had brought George home to luncheon one morning. Immediately after the repast Madame Walter was called to see one of the tradesmen, and the young fellow said to Susan: "Let us go and feed the goldfish."

They each took a piece of bread from the table and went into the conservatory. As they leaned over the edge of the marble basin, George and Susan saw their own faces looking up from the water, and smiled at them. All at once he said in a low voice: "It is not kind to hide things from me, Susan."

"What do you mean, Bel-Ami?" asked she.

"Don't you remember what you promised me here on the evening of the fête?"

"No."

"To consult me every time your hand was asked for."

"Well?"

"Well, it has been asked for."

"By whom?"

"You know very well."

"No. I swear to you."

"Yes, you do. That great fop, the Marquis de Cazolles."

"He is not a fop, in the first place."

"It may be so, but he is stupid, ruined by play, and worn out by dissipation. It is really a bad match for you, so pretty, so fresh and so intelligent."

She inquired, smiling: "What have you against him?"

"I? Nothing."

"Yes, you have. He is not all that you say."

"Nonsense. He is a fool and an intriguer."

She turned round somewhat, leaving off looking into the water, and said: "Come, what is the matter with you?"

He said, as though a secret were being wrenched from the bottom of his heart: "I—I—am jealous of him."

She was slightly astonished, saying: "You?"

"Yes, I."

"Why so?"

"Because I am in love with you, and you know it very well, you naughty girl."

She said in a severe tone: "You are mad, Bel-Ami."

He replied: "I know very well that I am mad. Ought I to have admitted that—I, a married man, to you, a young girl? I am more than mad, I am guilty. I have no possible hope, and the thought of that drives me out of my senses. And when I hear it said that you are going to be married, I have fits of rage, so that I could kill some one. You must forgive me this, Susan."

He was silent. The young girl murmured half sadly, half gaily: "It is a pity that you are married. What is to be done? It cannot be helped. It is done."

He turned suddenly toward her and said, speaking close to her face: "If I were free, would you marry me?"

She replied in a tone of sincerity: "Yes, Bel-Ami, I would marry you, for you please me far better than any of the others."

He rose and stammered: "Thanks, thanks; do not say 'yes' to any one yet, I beg of you; wait a little longer, I entreat you. Will you promise me this much?"

She murmured, somewhat uneasy and without understanding what he wanted: "Yes, I promise you."

Duroy threw the lump of bread he still held in his hand into the water and fled as though he had lost his head, without wishing her good-by.

Susan, surprised and uneasy, got up and returned slowly to the dining-room. The journalist had left.

He came home very calm, and as Madeleine was writing letters, said to her: "Are you going to dine at the Walters' on Friday? I am going."

She hesitated and replied: "No. I do not feel very well. I would rather stay at home."

He remarked: "Just as you like."

Then he took his hat and went out again at once. For some time past he had been keeping watch over her, following her about, knowing all her movements. The hour he had been awaiting was at length at hand. He had not been deceived by the tone in which she had said: "I would rather stay at home."

He was very amiable toward her during the next few days. He even appeared lively, which was not usual, and she said: "You are growing quite nice again."

He dressed early on the Friday, in order to make some calls before going to the Walters', he said. He started just before six, after having kissed his wife, and went and took a cab at the Place Notre Dame de Lorette. He said to the driver: "Stop in front of No. 17 Rue Fontaine and stay there till I tell you to go on again. Then drive to the Cock Pheasant Restaurant in the Rue Lafayette."

The cab started at a slow trot, and Duroy drew down the blinds. As soon as he was opposite his door, he did not take his eyes off it. After waiting ten minutes he saw Madeleine come out and go in the direction of the outer boulevards. As soon as she had gone far enough he put his head through the window and said to the driver: "Go on." The cab started again and landed him in front of the Cock Pheasant, a well-known middle-class restaurant. George went into the main dining-room and ate slowly, looking at his

watch from time to time. At half-past seven, when he had finished his coffee, drunk two *petits verres* of the best brandy and slowly smoked a good cigar, he went out, hailed another cab that was going by empty and was driven to the Rue La Rouchefoucauld. Without making any inquiry of the concierge he went upstairs to the third story of the house he had told the man to drive to, and when a servant opened the door to him, said: "Monsieur Guibert de Lorme is at home, is he not?"

"Yes, sir."

He was ushered into the drawing-room, where he waited for a few moments. Then a gentleman came in, tall and with a military bearing, gray-haired, though still young, and wearing the ribbon of the Legion of Honor. Duroy bowed and said: "As I foresaw, commissary, my wife is now dining under suspicious circumstances in furnished rooms in the Rue des Martyrs."

The commissary of police bowed, saying: "I am at your service, sir."

George continued: "You have until nine o'clock, have you not? That limit of time passed; you can no longer enter a private dwelling to prove a crime."

"No, sir; seven o'clock in winter, nine o'clock from the 31st of March. It is the 5th of April, so we have till nine o'clock."

"Very well, commissary, I have a cab downstairs."

"As you like, sir." The commissary left the room and then returned with an overcoat, hiding his tricolored sash.

They went first to the police office to pick up three officers in plain clothes, who were awaiting them, for George had given notice during the day that the surprise would take place that evening. One of the men got on the box beside the driver. The other two entered the cab, which reached the Rue des Martyrs. Duroy said:

"I have a plan of the rooms. They are on the second floor. We shall first find a little anteroom, then a dining-room, then the bedroom. The three rooms open into one another. There is no way out to facilitate flight."

When they arrived opposite the house it was only a quarter past eight, and they waited in silence for more than twenty minutes. But when he saw the three-quarters about to strike, George said: "Let us start now."

They went up the stairs without troubling themselves about the door-keeper, who, indeed, did not notice them.

At the end of two or three minutes George again pulled the bell several times in succession. They noted a noise from the further end of the rooms, and then a light step approached. Some one was coming to spy who was there. The journalist then rapped smartly on the panel of the door. A voice, a woman's voice, with an attempt to disguise it, asked: "Who is there?"

The commissary replied: "Open, in the name of the law."

The voice repeated: "Who are you?"

"I am the commissary of police. Open the door or I will have it broken in."

The voice went on: "What do you want?"

Duroy said: "It is I. It is useless to try to escape."

The light step, the tread of bare feet was heard to withdraw and then in a few seconds to return.

George said: "If you won't open, we will break in the door." He grasped the

handle and pushed slowly with his shoulder. As there was no longer any reply, he suddenly gave such a violent and vigorous shock that the old lock gave way. The screws were torn out of the wood, and he almost fell over Madeleine, who was standing in the anteroom.

An hour later George Duroy entered the offices of the *Vie Française*. Monsieur Walter was already there, for he continued to manage and supervise his paper with great care. It had enormously increased in circulation and greatly helped the schemes of his bank. The manager raised his head and said: "Ah! here you are. You look very strange. Why did you not come to dinner with us? What have you been up to?"

The young fellow, sure of his effect, said, emphasizing every word: "I have just overthrown the Minister of Foreign Affairs."

The other thought he was joking and said: "Overthrown what?"

"I am going to turn out the cabinet. That is all. It is quite time to get rid of that carrion."

The old man thought that his editor must be drunk. He murmured: "Come, you are talking nonsense."

"Not at all. I have just caught Monsieur Laroche-Mathieu *in flagrante delictu* with my wife. The commissary of police has verified the fact. The minister is done for." Walter, amazed, pushed his spectacles right back on his forehead and said: "You are not hoaxing me?"

"Not at all. I am even going to write an article on it."

"But what do you want to do?"

"To upset that scoundrel, that wretch, that bare-faced criminal." George placed his hat on an armchair and added: "Woe to those who cross my path. I never forgive."

The manager still failed to understand. He murmured: "But—your wife?"

"My application for a divorce will be lodged to-morrow morning. I shall return her to the departed Forestier."

"You mean to get a divorce?"

"Yes. I made myself ridiculous. But I had to do it in order to catch them. That's done. I am master of the situation."

Monsieur Walter could not get over it and watched Duroy with startled eyes, thinking: "Hang it, here is a fellow to beware of."

George went on: "I am now free. I have some money. I shall offer myself as a candidate at the October elections for my native place, where I am well known. I could not take a position or make myself respected with that woman who was suspected by every one. She had caught me like a fool, humbugged and ensnared me. But since I became alive to her little game I kept watch on her." He began to laugh and added: "It was poor Forestier who was the fool without imagining it, confiding and tranquil. Now I am free. Now I shall get on."

And Daddy Walter, still looking at him with unveiled eyes, his spectacles remaining pushed up on his forehead, said to himself: "Yes, he will get on, the rascal."

George rose: "I am going to write the article. It must be done directly. But you know it will be terrible for the minister. He has gone under. He cannot be fished up again. The *Vie Française* no longer needs to stand in awe of him."

The older man hesitated a few moments and then made up his mind. "Do so," said he; "so much the worse for those who get into such scrapes."

CHAPTER XVII

THE LAST PLOT

THREE months had elapsed and Duroy's divorce had just been granted. His wife had resumed the name of Forestier, and, as the Walters were to leave on the 15th of July for Trouville, it was decided that he and they should spend a day in the country together before they started. Bel-Ami had asked to be the only man of the party, for he could not endure the presence of the Marquis de Cazolles. But at the last moment it was decided that the Comte de Latour-Yvelin should be called for on the way. He had been invited the day before.

The carriage passed along the Avenue des Champs Elysées at a swinging trot and then traversed the Bois de Boulogne. It was splendid summer weather, not too warm. They crossed the Seine, skirted Mount Valerien and gained Bougival in order to follow the river as far as Le Pecq.

The Comte de Latour-Yvelin, a man advancing toward middle age, with long, light whiskers, gazed tenderly at Rose. They had been engaged for a month. George, who was very pale, often looked at Susan, who was pale, too. Their glances constantly met and seemed to blend, to understand one another, to secretly exchange a thought and then to avoid one another. Madame Walter was quiet and happy.

The luncheon was long. Before starting back to Paris, George suggested a turn on the terrace. They stopped at first to admire the view. All ranged themselves in a line along the parapet and went into ecstasies over the far-stretching horizon.

Walter said: "Such a panorama is not to be found anywhere in the world. There is not one to match it in Switzerland."

Then they all began to walk on slowly, to take a stroll and enjoy the view. George and Susan remained behind. As soon as they were a few paces distant from the others, he said to her in a low and restrained voice: "Susan, I adore you. I love you to madness."

She murmured: "So do I love you, Bel-Ami."

He went on: "If I do not have you for my wife, I shall leave Paris and this country."

She replied: "Ask papa for my hand. Perhaps he will consent."

He made a gesture of impatience. "No, I tell you for the twentieth time that is useless. The door of your house would be closed to me. I would be dismissed from the paper and we should not be able even to see one another. Those would be the consequences if I should propose for you in the conventional manner. They have promised you

to the Marquis de Cazolles. They hope that you will end by saying 'yes,' and they are waiting for that."

She asked: "What is to be done?"

He hesitated, glancing at her sideways. "Do you love me enough to run a risk?"

She answered resolutely: "Yes."

"Very well. There is one way and only one. The thing must come from you and not from me. You are a spoiled child; they let you say whatever you like, and they will not be too much astonished at one act of daring the more on your part. Listen, then: This evening, on reaching home, you must go to your mamma first, your mamma alone, and tell her you want to marry me. She will be greatly moved and very angry——"

Susan interrupted him with: "Oh! mamma will agree."

He went on quickly: "No, you do not know her. She will be more vexed and angrier than your father. You will see how she will refuse. But you must be firm, you must not give way, you must repeat that you want to marry me and no one else. Will you do this?"

"I will."

"On leaving your mother, you must tell your father the same thing in a very serious and decided manner."

"Yes, yes; and then?"

"And then it is that matters become serious. If you are determined, very determined—very, very determined to be my wife, my dear, dear little Susan —I will—run away with you."

She gave a great start of joy and almost clapped her hands. "Oh! how delightful. You will run away with me. When will you run away with me?"

All the old poetry of nocturnal elopements, postchaises, country inns; all the charming adventures told in books flashed through her mind like an enchanting dream about to be realized. She repeated: "When will you run away with me?"

He replied in low tones: "This evening—to-night."

She asked, quivering: "And where shall we go?"

"That is my secret. Reflect on what you are doing. Remember that after such a flight you can only be my wife. It is the only way, but it is—it is very dangerous—for you."

She declared: "I have made up my mind. Where shall I meet you?"

"Can you get out of the hotel alone?"

"Yes. I know how to undo the little door."

"Well, when the doorkeeper has gone to bed, toward midnight, come and meet me on the Place de la Concorde. You will find me in a cab drawn up in front of the Ministry of Marine."

"I will come."

"Really?"

"Really."

He took her hand and pressed it. "Oh! how I love you. How good and brave you are! So you don't want to marry Monsieur de Cazolles?"

"Oh, no!"

"Your father was very angry when you said no?"

"I should think so. He wanted to send me back to the convent."

"You see that it is necessary to be energetic."

"I will be so."

She looked at the vast horizon, her head full of the idea of being run off with. She would go further than that—with him. She would be run away with.

She was proud of it. She scarcely thought of her reputation—of what shame might befall her.

Was she aware of it? Did she even suspect it?

Madame Walter, turning around, exclaimed: "Come along, little one. What are you doing with Bel-Ami?"

They rejoined the others and spoke of the seaside, where they would soon be. Then they returned home by way of Chatou, in order not to go over the same road twice. George no longer spoke. He reflected. If this little girl had a little courage, he was going to succeed at last. For three months he had been enveloping her in his net. He had made himself loved by her, as he knew how to make himself loved. He had captured her childish soul without difficulty. He had at first made her promise that she would refuse Monsieur de Cazolles. He had just made her promise that she would fly with him. For there was no other way. Madame Walter, he well understood, would never agree to give him her daughter. Thinking of all this, he replied in broken phrases to the remarks addressed to him and which he did not hear. He only seemed to come to himself when they reëntered Paris.

Susan, too, was thinking, and the bells of the four horses rang in her ears, making her see endless miles of highway under eternal moonlight, gloomy forests traversed, wayside inns and the hurry of the hostlers to change horses, for every one guesses that they are being pursued.

When the landau entered the courtyard of the town house they wanted to keep George to dinner. He refused and went home. After having eaten a little, he went through his papers, as if about to start on a long journey. He burned some compromising letters, hid others and wrote to some friends. From time to time he looked at the clock, thinking: "Things must be getting warm there." And a sense of uneasiness gnawed at his heart. Supposing he should fail? But what had he to fear? He could always get out of it. Yet it was a big game he was playing that evening.

He went out toward eleven o'clock, wandered about some time, took a cab and had it drawn up in the Place de la Concorde, in front of the Ministry of Marine. From time to time he struck a match to see the time by his watch. As he saw midnight approaching, his impatience became feverish. Every moment he thrust his head out of the window to look. A distant clock struck twelve, then another, nearer, then two together, then a last one, very far away. When the latter had ceased to sound, he thought: "It is all over. It is a failure. She won't come." He had made up his mind, however, to wait till daylight. In these matters one must be patient.

He heard the quarter strike, then the half hour, then three-quarters, and all the clocks struck "one," as they had struck midnight. He no longer expected her. He was merely remaining, racking his brain to divine what could have happened. All at once a woman's head was put through the carriage window and a voice said: "Are you there, Bel-Ami?"

He started, almost choked with emotion: "Is that you, Susan?"

"Yes, it is I."

He could not manage to turn the handle quickly enough and repeated:

"Ah! it is you, it is you; come inside."

She came in and fell against him. He said: "Go on" to the driver, and the cab started.

She gasped, without saying a word.

He asked: "Well, how did it go off?"

She murmured, almost fainting: "Oh! it was terrible, especially with mamma."

The cab rolled along the street. George took one of the young girl's hands and began to kiss it slowly and with respect. He scarcely knew what to say to her, being scarcely accustomed to platonic lovemaking. But all at once he thought he noticed that she was crying. He inquired with alarm: "What is the matter with you, darling?"

She replied in tearful tones: "Poor mamma, she will not be able to sleep if she has found out that I have gone."

Her mother, indeed, was not asleep.

As soon as Susan had left the room Madame Walter remained face to face with her husband. She asked, bewildered and stunned: "Good God! What is the meaning of this?"

Walter exclaimed furiously: "It means that that schemer has bewitched her. It is he who made her refuse Cazolles. He thinks her dowry worth trying for." He began to walk angrily up and down the room and went on: "You were always luring him here, too, yourself; you flattered him, you cajoled him, you could not coddle him enough. It was Bel-Ami here, Bel-Ami there, from morning till night. This is your reward."

She murmured with livid face: "I—I lured him?"

He shouted in her face: "Yes, you. You are all mad over him—Madame de Marelle, Susan and the rest. Do you think I did not see that you could not pass a couple of days without having him here?"

She drew herself up tragically: "I will not allow you to speak to me like that. You forget that I was not brought up like you, behind a counter."

He stood for a moment, stupefied, and then uttered a furious "Damn it all," and rushed out, slamming the door after him. As soon as she was alone she thought for a long time over the possible innocence or perfidy of this man. What a scoundrel if he had prepared the blow! And what would happen? What dangers and what tortures she foresaw! If he knew nothing all could yet be arranged. They would travel about with Susan for six months, and it would be all over. But how could she meet him herself afterward? She looked at the clock; it was past one. She said to herself: "I cannot remain like this; I shall go mad. I must know. I will wake up Susan and question her."

She went, barefooted, in order not to make a noise, with a candle in her hand, toward her daughter's room. She opened the door softly, went in and looked at the bed. It had not been lain in. She did not comprehend matters at first and thought that the girl might still be arguing with her father. But all at once a horrible suspicion crossed her mind, and she rushed to her husband's room. She reached it in a bound, blanched and gasping for breath. He was in bed reading.

He asked, startled: "Well, what is it? What is the matter with you?"

She stammered: "Have you seen Susan?"

"I? No; why?"

"She has—she has—gone! She is not in her room."

He sprang to the floor, thrust his feet

into his slippers, and, with his shirt tails floating in the air, rushed in turn to his daughter's room. As soon as he saw it, he no longer retained any doubt. She had fled. He dropped into a chair and placed his lamp on the ground in front of him.

His wife had rejoined him and stammered: "Well?"

He had no longer the strength to reply. He was no longer enraged, he only groaned: "It is done, he has got her. We are done for."

She did not understand and said: "What do you mean, done for?"

"Yes, by Jove! He will certainly marry her now."

She gave a cry like that of a wild beast: "He, never! You must be mad."

He replied sadly: "It is no use screaming. He has run away with her. The best thing is to give her to him. By setting to work in the right way no one will know anything of this escapade."

She repeated, shaken by terrible emotion: "Never, never; he shall never have Susan. I will never consent."

Walter murmured dejectedly: "But he has got her. It is done. And he will keep her and hide her as long as we do not yield. So, to avoid scandal, we must give in at once."

He ended by getting angry, and taking up, as a practical man, the cudgels on behalf of Bel-Ami: "Hold your tongue," said he. "I tell you again that it must be so; it absolutely must. And who knows? Perhaps we shall not regret it. With men of that stamp one never knows what may happen. You saw how he overthrew in three articles that fool of a Laroche-Mathieu, and how he did it with dignity, which was infernally difficult in his position as the husband. At all events, we shall see. It just comes to this, that we are trapped. We cannot get out of it."

She felt a longing to scream, to roll on the ground, to tear her hair out. She said at length in exasperated tones: "He shall not have her. I won't have it."

Walter rose, picked up his lamp and remarked:

"There you are, stupid just like all women. You never do anything except from passion. You do not know how to bend yourself to circumstances. You are all stupid. I tell you that he shall marry her. He must."

He went out, shuffling along in his slippers. He was a comical figure in his night-shirt as he traversed the broad corridor of the huge, silent house and noiselessly reëntered his room.

Madame Walter remained standing, torn by intolerable grief. She did not yet quite understand it. She was only conscious of suffering. Then it seemed to her that she could not remain there motionless till daylight. She felt within her an urgent need of fleeing, of running away, of seeking help, of obtaining succor. She took her candle, left the room and went downstairs to the conservatory. The picture of Jesus was right at the end of it in a small drawing-room, shut off by a glass door, in order that the humidity from the soil should not damage the canvas. It formed a kind of chapel in a forest of strange trees. The poor woman walked slowly, oppressed by the shadows, amid which appeared, by the flickering light of her candle, immense plants, recalling monsters, living creatures, hideous deformities. All at once she caught sight of the picture of Christ. She opened the door

separating her from it and fell on her knees. She prayed to Him, wildly at first, stammering forth words of true, passionate and despairing invocations. Then, the ardor of her appeal slackening, she raised her eyes toward Him, and was struck with anguish. He resembled Bel-Ami so strongly, in the trembling light of this solitary candle lighting the picture from below, that it was no longer Christ—it was Bel-Ami who was looking at her. They were his eyes, his forehead, the expression of his face, his cold and haughty air.

She stammered: "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!" and the name "George" rose to her lips. All at once she uttered a loud cry and fell on her back. Her candle, overturned, went out.

The next morning Madame Walter was found stretched out senseless, almost asphyxiated, before "Jesus Walking on the Waters." She was so ill that they feared for her life. She only fully recovered the use of her senses the following day. Then she began to weep. The disappearance of Susan was explained to the servants as due to her being suddenly sent back to the convent. And Monsieur Walter replied to a long letter of Duroy by granting him his daughter's hand. Bel-Ami had posted this letter at the moment of leaving Paris, for he had prepared it in advance the evening of his departure. He said in it, in respectful terms, that he had long loved the young girl; that there had never been any agreement between them; but that finding her come freely to him to say: "I wish to be your wife," he considered himself authorized in keeping her, even in hiding her, until he had obtained an answer from her parents, whose legal power had for him less weight than the wish of his betrothed. He begged Monsieur Walter to address his reply "Post-restante," a friend being charged to forward the letter to him.

When he had obtained what he wished, he brought back Susan to Paris and sent her on to her parents, abstaining from appearing himself for some little time.

They had spent six days on the banks of the Seine at La Roche Guyon.

The young girl had never enjoyed herself so much. She had played at pastoral life. As he passed her off as his sister, they lived in a free and chaste intimacy—a kind of loving friendship. He thought it a clever stroke to respect her. On the day after their arrival she had bought some underwear and some peasant's clothes and set to work fishing, with a huge straw hat, ornamented with wild flowers, on her head. She thought the country delightful. There was an old tower and an old château in which beautiful tapestries were exhibited.

George, dressed in a fisherman's jersey, bought from a local tradesman, escorted Susan now on foot along the banks of the river, now in a boat. They kissed at every moment, she in all innocence and he ready to succumb to temptation. But he was able to restrain himself, and when he said to her: "We will go back to Paris to-morrow, your father has granted me your hand," she murmured simply: "Already? It was so nice being with you, Bel-Ami."

CHAPTER XVIII

HE LAUGHS WHO WINS

It was dark in the little suite of rooms in the Rue de Constantinople, for George Duroy and Clotilde de Marelle, having met at the door, had gone in at once, and she had said to him, without giving him time to open the Venetian blinds: "So you are going to marry Susan Walter?" He admitted it quietly and added: "Did not you know it?"

She exclaimed, standing before him, furious and indignant: "So you are going to marry Susan Walter? That is a little too much of a good thing. For three months you have been pretending to me in order to hide it from me. Every one knew it but I. It was my husband who told me of it."

Duroy began to laugh, though somewhat confused all the same, and having placed his hat on a corner of the mantelshelf, sat down in an armchair. She looked at him straight in the face and said in a low and irritated tone: "Ever since you left your wife you have been preparing for this move, and you only amused yourself with me to fill up the interim. What a rascal you are!"

He asked: "Why so? I had a wife who deceived me. I caught her, I obtained a divorce and I am going to marry another. What could be simpler?"

She murmured, quivering: "Oh! how cunning and dangerous you are!"

He began to smile again.

"By Jove! Simpletons and fools are always some one's dupes."

But she continued to follow out her idea: "I ought to have guessed your character from the beginning. But no, I could not believe that you could be such a blackguard as that."

He assumed an air of dignity, saying: "I beg of you to be careful about the words you are making use of."

His indignation revolted her: "What? You want me to put on gloves in dealing with you now. You have behaved toward me like a vagabond ever since I have known you, and you want to make out that I am not to tell you so. You deceive every one, you take advantage of every one; you filch money and enjoyment wherever you can, and you want me to treat you as an honest man!"

He rose and, with quivering lip, said: "Be quiet or I will turn you out of here."

"Do you think I don't know how you robbed Madeleine of half Vaudrec's money? Do you think I don't know how you obliged Susan to marry you?"

He seized her by the shoulders, and, shaking her with both hands, exclaimed: "Don't speak of her, at any rate. I won't have it."

She screamed out: "You deceived her; I know you did."

He would have accepted no matter what, but this falsehood exasperated him. The truths she had told him to his face had caused thrills of anger to run through him, but this lie respecting the young girl who was going to be his wife aroused in the palm of his hand a furious longing to strike her.

He repeated: "Be quiet—have a care—be quiet," and shook her as one

shakes a branch to make the fruit fall.

She screamed, with her hair coming down, her mouth wide open, her eyes aglow: "You deceived her!"

He let her go and gave her such a smack on the face that she fell down beside the wall. But she turned toward him, and, raising herself on her hands, once more shouted: "You deceived her!"

He rushed at her, and holding her down, struck her as though striking a man. She left off shouting and began to moan beneath his blows. She no longer stirred, but hid her face against the wall and uttered plaintive cries. He left off beating her and rose up. Then he walked about the room a little to recover his coolness, and, an idea occurring to him, he went and filled a basin with cold water and dipped his head into it. Then he washed his hands and came back to see what she was doing, carefully wiping his fingers. She had not budged, was still, quietly weeping.

"Are you going to stop blubbering?" he said.

She did not answer. He stood in the middle of the room, feeling somewhat awkward and ashamed in presence of this form stretched out before him. All at once he formed a resolution and took his hat from the mantelshelf, saying: "Good-night. Give the key to the doorkeeper when you leave. I shan't wait for your convenience." He went out, closed the door, went to the concierge and said: "Madame is still there. She will be leaving in a few minutes. Tell the landlord that I give notice to leave at the end of September. It is the 16th of August, so I am within the limit."

And he walked hastily away, for he had some pressing calls to make touching the purchase of the last wedding gifts.

The wedding was fixed for the 20th of October, after the meeting of the Chambers. It was to take place at the Church of the Madeleine. There had been a great deal of gossip about it, without any one knowing the exact truth. Different tales were in circulation. It was whispered that an elopement had taken place, but no one was certain about anything. According to the servants, Madame Walter, who would no longer speak to her future son-in-law, had poisoned herself out of rage the very morning the match was decided on, after having taken her daughter off to a convent at midnight. She had been brought back almost dead. Certainly she would never get over it. She had now the appearance of an old woman; her hair had become quite gray, and she had gone in for religion, taking the sacrament every Sunday.

At the beginning of September the *Vie Française* announced that the Baron du Roy de Cantel had become editor-in-chief, Monsieur Walter retaining the title of manager. A battalion of well-known writers, reporters, political editors, art and theatrical critics, detached from old important papers by dint of monetary influence, were taken on. The old journalists, the serious and respectable ones, no longer shrugged their shoulders when speaking of the *Vie Française*. Rapid and complete success had wiped out the contempt of serious writers for the beginnings of this paper.

The marriage of its chief editor was what is styled a Parisian event, George Duroy and the Walters having excited a great deal of curiosity for some time past. All the people who are written about in the papers promised them-

selves to be there.

The event took place on a bright autumn day.

At eight in the morning the sight of the staff of the Madeleine stretching a broad red carpet down the lofty flight of steps overlooking the Rue Royale caused passers-by to pause and announced to the people of Paris that an important ceremony was about to take place. The clerks on the way to their offices, the work girls, the shopmen paused, looked and vaguely speculated about the rich folk who spent so much money over getting spliced. Toward ten o'clock idlers began to halt. They would remain for a few minutes, hoping that it would perhaps begin at once, and then move away. At eleven squads of police arrived and set to work almost immediately to make the crowd move on, as fresh groups formed every moment. The first guests soon made their appearance—those who wanted a good seat so as to see everything. They took the chairs bordering the main aisle. By degrees came others, ladies rustling silks and serious-looking gentlemen, almost all bald, walking with well-bred air and graver than usual in this locality.

The church slowly filled. A flood of sunlight entering the huge doorway, lit up the front rows of guests.

In the chancel, which looked somewhat gloomy, the altar, laden with tapers, shed a yellow light, pale and insignificant beside the main entrance. People recognized one another, beckoned to one another and gathered in groups. The literary men, less respectful than the society men, chatted in low tones and looked at the ladies.

Norbert de Varenne, who was looking out for an acquaintance, perceived Jacques Rival near the centre of the rows of chairs, and joined him. "Well," said he, "the race is to the crafty."

The other, who was not envious, replied: "So much the better for him. His career is made." And they began to point out the people they recognized.

"Do you know what has become of his wife?" asked Rival.

The poet smiled. "Yes and no. She is living in a very retired style, I am told, in the Montmartre district. But —there is a but—I have noticed for some time past in the *Plume* some political articles terribly like those of Forestier and Duroy. They are by Jean Le Dal, a handsome, intelligent young fellow, of the same breed as our friend George, and who has made the acquaintance of his late wife. From whence I conclude that she had, and always will have, a fancy for beginners. Besides, she is quite well off and continues to wield considerable silent force on the body politic."

Rival observed: "She is not bad-looking. Madeleine is very clever and very sharp. But, tell me, how is it that Duroy comes to be married in church after a divorce?"

Norbert replied: "He is married in church because, in the eyes of the Church, he was not married before."

"How so?"

"Our friend, Bel-Ami, from indifference or economy, thought the registrar sufficient when marrying Madeleine Forestier. He therefore dispensed with the ecclesiastical benediction of the Holy Mother Church. Consequently he comes before her to-day as a bachelor, and she lends him all her pomp and ceremony, which will cost Daddy Walter a pretty penny."

Rival resumed: "Tell me, my dear fellow, you who go so often to the Walters', is it true that Duroy and Madame Walter never speak to one another now?"

"Never. She did not want to give him the girl. But he had a hold, it seems, on the father through skeletons in the house—skeletons connected with the Morocco business. He threatened the old man with frightful revelations. Walter recollected the example he made of Laroche-Mathieu, and gave it at once. But the mother, obstinate like all women, swore that she would never again speak a word to her son-in-law. She looks like a statue, a statue of Vengeance, and he is very uneasy at it, although he puts a good face on the matter, for he knows how to control himself, that fellow does."

Fellow journalists came up and shook hands with them. Bits of political conversation could be caught.

All at once the beadle struck the pavement thrice with the butt of his halberd. Every one turned round with a prolonged rustling of skirts and a moving of chairs. The bride appeared on her father's arm in the bright light of the doorway.

She had still the air of a doll, a charming white doll crowned with orange flowers. She stood for a few moments on the threshold; then, when she made her first step up the aisle, the organ gave forth a powerful note, announcing the entrance of the bride in loud, metallic tones. She advanced with bent head, but not timidly; vaguely moved, pretty, charming, a miniature bride. Madame Walter followed them, giving her arm to the father of her other son-in-law, the Marquis de Latour-Yvelin, aged seventy-two. She did not walk, but dragged herself along, ready to faint at each forward movement.

Then George Duroy appeared with an old lady, unknown. He, too, kept his head up without turning aside his eyes, fixed and stern under his slightly bent brows. His mustache seemed to bristle on his lips. He was set down as a very good-looking fellow. He had a proud bearing, a good figure and a straight leg. He wore his clothes well, the little red ribbon of the Legion of Honor showing like a drop of blood on his dress coat.

The organ was playing, pouring forth through the immense building the sonorous and rhythmic accents of its glittering throats, which cry aloud unto Heaven the joy or grief of mankind. The great doors were closed, and all at once it became as gloomy as if the sun had just been turned out.

Now George was kneeling beside his wife in the chair, before the lighted altar. The new Bishop of Tangiers, crozier in hand and mitre on head, made his appearance from the vestry to join them together in the Eternal name. He put the customary questions, exchanged the rings, uttered the words that bind like chains and addressed to the newly wedded couple a Christian allocution.

He was declaiming: "You are among the fortunate ones of this world, among the wealthiest and most respected. You, sir, whom your talent raises above others; you who write, who teach, who advise, who guide the people, you have a noble mission to fulfill, a noble example to set."

Duroy listened, intoxicated with pride. A prelate of the Roman Catholic

Church was speaking thus to him. And he felt behind him a crowd, an illustrious crowd, gathered on his account. It seemed to him that some power impelled and lifted him up. He was becoming one of the masters of the world —he, the son of two poor peasants of Canteleu. He saw them all at once in their humble wayside inn, at the summit of the slope, overlooking the broad valley of Rouen, his father and mother, serving the countryfolk of the district with drink. He had sent them five thousand francs on inheriting from the Comte de Vaudrec. He would now send them fifty thousand and they would buy a little estate. They would be satisfied and happy.

The bishop had finished his harangue.

Bel-Ami, on his knees beside Susan, had bowed his head. He felt at that moment almost a believer, almost religious; full of gratitude toward the Divinity who had thus favored him, who treated him with such consideration. And, without exactly knowing to whom he was addressing himself, he thanked Him for his success.

When the ceremony was concluded he rose up, and, giving his wife his arm, passed into the vestry. Then began the interminable defiling past of the visitors. George, wild with joy, believed himself a king whom a nation had come to acclaim. He shook hands, stammered unmeaning remarks, bowed and replied: "You are very good to say so."

All at once he caught sight of Madame de Marelle. She drew near, somewhat timid, somewhat uneasy, and held out her hand. He took it in his and retained it. Then he felt the discreet appeal of a woman's fingers, the soft pressure that forgives. And for his own part he squeezed it, that little hand, as though to say: "I still love you."

Their eyes met, smiling, bright. She murmured in her pleasant voice: "I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you again soon, monsieur."

He replied gaily: "Soon, madame."

She passed on. Other people were pushing forward.

The crowd flowed by like a stream. At length it grew thinner. The last guests took leave.

George took Susan's arm in his to pass through the church again. It was full of people, for every one had regained their seats in order to see them pass together. They went by slowly, with calm steps and uplifted heads, their eyes fixed on the wide sunlit space of the open door. He felt little quiverings run all over his skin, those cold shivers caused by overpowering happiness. He saw no one. His thoughts were solely for himself. When he gained the threshold he saw the crowd collected—a dense, agitated crowd gathered there on his account—on account of George Duroy. The people of Paris were gazing at and envying him. Then, raising his eyes, he could see afar off, beyond the Place de la Concorde, the Chamber of Deputies, and it seemed to him that he was going to make one jump from the portico of the Madeleine to that of the Palais Bourbon.

He slowly descended the long flight of steps between two ranks of spectators. But he did not see them. His thoughts had now turned backward, and before his eyes, dazzled by the brilliant sun, there floated the image of Madame de Marelle, readjusting before the mirror the little curls on her temples, always disarranged.

VOLUME II

OUR HEARTS

OUR HEARTS

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST MEETING

One day Massival, the celebrated composer of "Rebecca," who had for fifteen years been called the "young and illustrious musician," said to his friend, André Mariolle:

"How is it that you have never yet been presented to Mme. Michèle de Burne? I assure you that she is one of the most interesting women of the Paris of to-day."

"Because I do not consider myself at all the kind of person to fit in with her clique."

"My dear boy, you are greatly mistaken. Her *salon* is extremely original, stimulating and artistic: one hears excellent music there, and the conversation would do credit to the most renowned *potinières* of the last century. You would meet with the utmost appreciation at Mme. de Burne's: for one reason because you play the violin so admirably, for another because you bear the reputation of being the opposite of commonplace, and, moreover, are chary of your society."

Flattered, but still holding back, believing also that the young hostess in question was not entirely unaware of this overture, Mariolle exclaimed: "Pshaw! I do not feel at all inclined to go," but in such a manner that the indifference conveyed by the words was belied by an evident intention to consent. Massival went on:

"Let me take you there and present you to her one of these days. You already know her through hearing all of us talk of her, as we so frequently do. She is a remarkably bright and very pretty woman who, although only twenty-eight years of age, has foresworn matrimony, her first venture in that line having been so disastrous that she has resolved never to attempt another. Her salon is the rendezvous of agreeable men—not merely clubmen or society men—there are just enough of those to give it tone. I know she would be very glad to see you if I were to take you there."

Persuaded, Mariolle said: "All right then, one of these days."

A few days later the musician dropped in, saying:

"Are you engaged to dine anywhere to-morrow?"

"No, not exactly—but——"

"Then you must come to dinner at Mme. de Burne's. She has commissioned me to invite you, and I have, moreover, a note from her for you."

After a moment's hesitation for form's sake, Mariolle said:

"Very well, I'll go."

About twenty-seven years of age, a bachelor without profession, rich enough to take life as he pleased and

to have travelled and accumulated a collection of modern paintings and antique trifles, André Mariolle bore the reputation of a man possessing a fine mind but a whimsical, capricious nature: one who posed as a recluse more from pride and reserve than from timidity. With fine natural gifts, quick of apprehension and perhaps of accomplishment, he had through indolence contented himself with the rôle of an onlooker, or, perhaps, to speak more accurately, of an amateur. Had he been born poor he would doubtless have made his mark, but the proverbial golden spoon having been his, he was haunted by eternal self-reproach at having achieved nothing. It is true he had made several half-hearted attempts: one in the direction of literature when he published a volume of sketches in which he showed himself the possessor of a polished and spirited style; another in music, in performing on the violin, in which accomplishment he had acquired sufficient skill to elicit, even from professionals, a recognition of his having won a high place among amateurs; and lastly, one in sculpture, that art in which a clever knack in portraying striking figures replaces knowledge and study in the eyes of the ignorant. A fine horseman, he was also, report said, an expert fencer, but he refrained from exhibiting his dexterity in public; perhaps withheld from doing so by the same discretion that forbade his mingling in cliques where dangerous rivalry was to be encountered. Nevertheless, his friends extolled his abilities highly and sounded his praises with unanimity—it may be the more cordially because he never sought to eclipse them. All agreed that he was a trustworthy friend and a congenial companion. He was tall with a pointed beard; his hair was slightly grizzled but crisp and waving prettily, and he looked straight at you with a pair of bright, distrustful and rather dark eyes. His most intimate friends were the novelist, Gaston de Lamarthe; the composer, Massival; the painters, Jobin, De Rivollet and De Maudel, who, one and all, appeared to value his friendship, his wit and even his judgment, while at the same time, with the vanity inseparable from men to whom success has undeniably come, they voted him in their hearts an amiable and decidedly intelligent failure.

His haughty reserve seemed to say: "I have achieved nothing, simply because I did not think it worth while to try." He desired to enter only those houses in which his solid but concealed gifts would be acknowledged.

The reason why he allowed himself to be so easily persuaded to go to Mme. de Burne's was because his best friends, those who industriously proclaimed his hidden talents, were the most intimate frequenters of her salon.

She lived in a pretty entresol, Rue du Général Foy, behind Saint Augustin. The dining-room and the general reception room looked on the street; two other rooms on a fine garden belonging to the proprietor of the house. One of these was the salon, a very large, long room with three windows opening on trees whose leaves rustled against the panes. This room contained exceptionally beautiful, though chastely simple furniture; all its belongings spoke of exquisite taste and unlimited expenditure—the chairs and tables, the dainty cabinets and étagères, the paintings, the porcelain figurines under glass

shades, the vases, statuettes and the huge timepiece occupying the centre of a panel. All the decoration of this room attracted and detained the eye. In order to create this interior, of which she was almost as proud as of her own personality, Mme. de Burne had put in requisition the friendship, the knowledge, the instinct for search of all the artists of her acquaintance. To please this woman, who was rich and paid lavishly, they had ransacked Paris for artistic furnishings and decorations, and the result was a salon renowned throughout the city and one which it was her joy to feel was more alluring than the conventional drawing-room of the ordinary woman of society. It was a favorite theory of hers that the easy comfort of luxurious seats, the perfect grace of outlines, the harmony of carefully blended shades of color held and captivated the incoming guest just as a pretty smile did. There are sympathetic and antipathetic interiors, she maintained; interiors, both rich and poor, that attract or repel the beings who enter them, make them gay or sad, stimulate or numb their faculties, warm or chill their hearts and inspire them with an intense desire either to remain or to depart. In the centre of this apartment a grand piano held the place of honor, dominating all. Farther on a high pair of folding doors led to a bedroom which again opened into a dressing-room hung with Persian curtains. In this room Mme. de Burne generally sat when alone.

Married to a well-bred scoundrel of polished manners, one of those domestic tyrants before whom all the women of their households are expected to bow and yield, she had for five years led a most wretched existence. For five years she had been forced to bear the exactions, the harshness, the jealousy, even the bodily violence of this despot. From the first days of their union the coarse brutality of his animal nature, unsoftened by even ordinary consideration or delicacy, had unspeakably revolted the woman who had become his prey. One night on his way home he fell dead suddenly from the rupture of an aneurism. When she saw the form of her husband carried in, covered by a sheet, she gazed upon it, scarcely able to realize the full significance of this deliverance, filled with intense joy and at the same time experiencing a horrible dread of manifesting it. Of a gay and independent disposition, at times even exuberantly so, lively and magnetic with the spontaneous wit and brightness one sees so often in women born in Paris who seem to have absorbed into their being in infancy the pungent breath of the boulevards, laden with the applause or hisses issuing from the open doors of the playhouses, she, notwithstanding, retained from the five years of her captivity a singular timidity, a dread of saying too much or doing the wrong thing. Her husband, a polished man of the world, had trained her to receive his guests with mute correctness, an elegant, beautifully dressed slave. Among the tyrant's friends were many artists whom she had welcomed with curiosity and listened to with delight, never daring to show how fully she comprehended and appreciated their genius. Her days of conventional mourning over, she invited a few of these to dinner one evening. Two sent excuses, three accepted and met to their astonishment a young hostess with a

candid soul and alluring manner who put them at their ease at once, declaring with frank grace how great had been her pleasure in meeting them in days gone by. Little by little she gleaned among the old-time acquaintances who had ignored and misunderstood her and ended by receiving, as an emancipated woman but one untouched by the faintest breath of slander, a few women and a number of men chosen from among the most brilliant lights of Paris. The first-chosen became the intimate habitués; they brought others, and Mme. de Burne's salon grew to be a sort of little court where every guest possessed some claim to distinction—fame, genius or an ancient name—several old titles being always heard among the names announced at her gatherings.

Her father, M. de Pradon, who occupied the apartment immediately above hers, served her as chaperon. A beau of an earlier generation, elegant and courtly, he was all attention to the daughter whom he treated habitually as a grande dame, presiding at her Thursday dinners. These functions were celebrated throughout Paris and invitations thereto eagerly sought. The claims of all would-be guests were carefully discussed, and, as often as not, dismissed after consultation held among the inner circle. Witty sayings that had circulated at these dinners leaked out and were quoted in the city. Débuts of actors, artists and young poets took place under Mme. de Burne's roof, long-haired devotees of music, introduced by Gaston de Lamarthe, superseded the Hungarian violinists first brought by Massival, and exotic dancing girls exhibited their fantastic gyrations in her salon before appearing at l'Eden or the Folies-Bergère.

Mme. de Burne, besides being jealously guarded by her friends, had an unpleasant recollection of the world at large from the experience gained during her married life, and in consequence did not feel disposed to enlarge her circle of acquaintance to any very extended degree. Satisfied with her environment and fearing the tongue of scandal, she gave way with watchful prudence to a certain innate tendency to bohemianism that was part of her nature. Anxious to preserve a spotless name, she curbed her penchant toward rashness, indulged only her most harmless whims and was careful not to give the slightest handle to those who would fain have suspected her of flirtation or intrigue. Many had besieged her heart, but no one so far, rumor said, had been rewarded with success. Men whispered this one to the other and with surprise, for few of the stronger sex have much faith in the virtue of an "unattached woman." Some said that the hateful recollection of her relations with her husband had cured her forever of any idea of listening to the voice of love. This was the preponderating opinion among the intimates, but the worldly wise Georges de Maltry laughed softly and announced: "Her time will come. It must come to a woman of that temperament; and the later it comes the more serious the affair will be. With her artistic bent, the probability is the man who awakens her heart will be a singer or a pianist."

Gaston de Lamarthe thought otherwise. In his character of novelist, observer and psychologist, making a specialty of studying people of the fashionable world, of whom he executed portraits both ironical and true to life,

he professed above all to understand and analyze women with unique and infallible penetration. He classed Mme. de Burne with the eccentric beings depicted in his absorbing romance "One of Them." He was the first to portray that new type of woman, swayed by semi-hysterical nerves, torn by a thousand contradictory whims that did not rise to the dignity of wishes, losing all illusions, yet having tasted no real joys, thanks to the trend of modern conditions and to the accident of circumstances, who without ardor in any direction, without enthusiasms, seem to combine the caprices of children with the exhausted vitality of old cynics.

He, among others, had been an unsuccessful aspirant. All the faithful intimates had become, one after another, épris of Mme. de Burne, and, the attack over, had remained still under her sway, though in different degrees. As time went on they seemed to form themselves into a little coterie of worshippers. She was their madonna, of whom they among themselves constantly thought and spoke, unable, even when absent from her, to throw off her power. They praised her, boasted of her, criticised her or depreciated her according to the way they felt she was treating them at the moment. Sensitively jealous of her and to some extent spying upon one another, they were careful to exclude from her new acquaintance any man who might prove a dangerous rival. There were seven of these devoted followers: Massival, Gaston de Lamarthe, the portly Fresnel and that combination of philosopher and ultra-fashionable young society man, M. Georges de Maltry, renowned for his paradoxes, his elaborate, eloquent, up-to-date erudition, incomprehensible to even his most ardent admirers, and even more celebrated for his taste in dress, as recherché as his theories; besides these chosen spirits, a few men of title, said to be also men of some degree of wit, the Comte de Marantin, the Baron de Gravil and two or three others also offered incense at the shrine.

The two privileged members of this band of the élite appeared to be Massival and Lamarthe, who seemed to possess the knack of being always able to amuse the young woman by their bohemian free and easiness, their chatter, their skill in taking everybody off—even their liege lady herself, when she would permit it. But the care which she took never to manifest to any one of her admirers a prolonged or marked predilection, her bright, coquettish manner toward each, and the perfectly impartial distribution of her favors among the members of the band, maintained among them a friendship spiced with hostility and an ardor of spirit that made the situation a most amusing one to watch.

Now and again one of them, to play a trick on the rest, would introduce a newcomer. But as this newcomer was never a very striking or interesting figure, the others were seldom perturbed by the incident. This was the way in which André Mariolle had been brought to visit Mme. de Burne.

A footman garbed in black announced the names:

"Monsieur Massival."

"Monsieur Mariolle."

Under the light of a lamp formed of a high column of gilded bronze dominated by a huge shade of crushed old

rose silk, a woman's head and three men's heads were bending over an album which Lamarthe had just brought in. The novelist was turning the pages and explaining the pictures.

One of the heads turned, and, Mariolle coming forward, saw a bright, blond face with fluffy curls at the temples that seemed to glow like brushwood on fire. The delicate retroussé nose gave animation to the face, the clearly cut mouth, the dimpled cheeks, the slightly prominent chin, gave an expression almost of mockery, but the eyes, light blue, with great, dilated pupils, were tinged with melancholy. This singular and brilliant look of the eyes suggested dreams produced by morphine, or, perhaps, merely a coquettish application of belladonna.

Mme. de Burne rose, and, holding out her hand, welcomed the newcomer: "I have been a long time begging our friends to bring you to see me," she said. "But I always have to ask for such things to be done several times before they happen."

She was tall, graceful, leisurely in her movements, slightly décolleté, showing scarcely the tips of her superb shoulders glowing pinky in the light of the lamp. Her hair was not red, but that indescribable color certain leaves take on when burned by the sun in autumn. She presented Mariolle to her father, who bowed and offered his hand. The men chatted familiarly among themselves in three groups, seeming perfectly at home, just as if they were in a sort of club, but where the presence of a woman compelled a certain gentleness of manner.

The portly Fresnel was talking with the Comte de Marantin. The assiduous visits of Fresnel to this house and the evident affection he felt for Mme. de Burne often irritated and even angered his friends. Still young, but fat as an alderman, puffy, almost clean shaven, his head covered by a thin coating of downy, light hair, he was common and tedious, and it was patent to all that he had assuredly but one feature to invest him with interest in the eyes of the young woman—one that would render him still more unattractive to other eyes—the fact that he loved her with infatuation, loved her with a blind, senseless intensity. He had been nicknamed "the seal." He was a married man, but he had never introduced his wife to Mme. Burne. Rumor said that she was very jealous of the young widow. Lamarthe and Massival particularly were indignant at the cordiality she manifested toward their puffy rival, and, when they could not refrain from expressing their reprobation, she would say, smiling:

"I love him just as I should a good, faithful spaniel."

Georges de Maltry and Gaston de Lamarthe were talking over the latest, as yet uncertain, discovery in regard to micro-biology. M. de Maltry advanced his theory on the subject with subtlety and depth of knowledge and the novelist accepted it with the eagerness with which men of letters generally welcome anything original and novel. The expositor of the beau-monde was fair, the flaxen type of fairness, slight and tall. He wore a coat fitting him tightly over the hips, and his clever-looking head, with its smooth, pale hair, so smooth that it looked as if it had been pasted down, rose above his white collar and tie. As to Lamarthe, Gaston

de Lamarthe (the "de" had inoculated him with a few pretensions in the direction of aristocracy and "high-life"), he was nothing if not a man of letters, a pitiless and terrible man of letters. Gifted with an eye that took in faces, attitudes, gestures with the precision of a camera, and endowed with a penetration and sense of romance as thoroughly a part of his make-up as is the scent in a hunting dog, he harvested from morning till night material for his work. With a wonderful grasp of the visible and an instinctive intuition revealing to him that which was hidden from others, he created books that seemed like extracts from human life, so vivid was their color, their tone, their action. The appearance of each of his novels convulsed society with agitation, conjectures, mirth and vexation, for people guessed at the thinly masked characters, and his passage through a salon invariably left a crowd of perturbed persons in its wake. He had published a volume of reminiscences in which many men and women of his acquaintance had been portrayed, not exactly spitefully, but with an accuracy, an incisiveness that tortured the originals. Some one had nicknamed him "Save me from my friends." With an inscrutable nature and a reticent tongue, he was said to have been at one time deeply in love with a woman who had flouted his love; on her account he had avenged himself on all other women.

Massival and he were thoroughly congenial, although the nature of the musician was a very different one—franker, more expansive, less susceptible, perhaps, but more apparently sensitive. After producing two great successes, a piece played in Brussels, then presented in Paris, where it had been received with acclamation at the Opéra-Comique, and a second work accepted at once at the Grand Opéra, and welcomed as the announcement of a new star rising in the musical world, he had then experienced that sort of check that seems to occur to so many artists of to-day, seeming almost like a kind of premature paralysis. They do not grow old, mantled in glory and success, like their fathers, but seem stricken with loss of power in the flower of their age. Lamarthe used to say: "Nowadays, we in France have nothing but great men who have become fiascos!" Massival, about this time, seemed extremely épris of Mme. de Burne, and the coterie was gossiping about it; therefore every eye was turned on him when he kissed her hand with a look of adoration. He asked:

"Are we late?" She replied:

"No. I am still expecting the Baron de Gravil and the Marquise de Bratiane."

"The marquise! What luck! Then we shall have some music to-night?"

"I hope so."

The tardy pair entered. The marquise, who, on account of a tendency to embonpoint, appeared short, was of Italian birth, lively, with black eyes, eyelashes and eyebrows, and thick black hair that almost covered her forehead and even threatened her eyes. She was said to possess one of the most remarkable voices to be heard among women of society. The baron, a well-bred man, with a narrow chest and huge head, was incomplete without his violoncello in his hands. A passionate melomaniac, he was never seen except at houses where music was a chief ele-

ment in the entertainment.

Dinner was announced, and Mme. de Burne, taking the arm of André Mariolle, allowed her guests to precede them. When all had left the salon and they were alone, at the moment when they were about to follow, she shot at him an oblique, lightning flash out of her pale, large-pupilled eyes—a look in which he discovered a more vivid interest than is usually manifested in the expression of pretty young hostesses who are receiving a young man on the occasion of his first visit.

The dinner was dull and monotonous. Lamarthe, nervous and preoccupied, seemed hostile to everybody; not openly hostile, for he plumed himself upon his good breeding, but inspired by that almost imperceptible ill-humor that at once lowers the social thermometer at any gathering. Massival, absent-minded also, ate little and looked furtively from time to time at the mistress of the house, who seemed inattentive, smiled in answer to remarks, then became instantly serious, her mind apparently dwelling on matters that interested her far more than did her friends. Notwithstanding, she did her duty amply as a hostess toward the marquise and Mariolle, but she did it mechanically and from a sense of propriety, her mind evidently far from herself and her surroundings. Fresnel and M. de Maltry were at odds over contemporary poetry. Fresnel possessed on the subject of poetry the superficial ideas of the ordinary man of the world, while M. de Maltry had a very different point of view.

Several times during dinner Mariolle again encountered that singular glance from his hostess, but each time less intense, less inquisitive. Among the guests only the Marquise de Bratiane, the Comte de Marantin and the Baron de Gravil seemed to be in their usual vein; these three chattered unceasingly, discussing a variety of topics.

The dinner over, Massival, more and more depressed, sat down at the piano and sounded a few notes. Mme. de Burne at once awoke from her revery and organized a little concert composed of the pieces she enjoyed the most. The marquise was in good voice, and, stimulated by the presence of Massival, sang like a true artist. The composer accompanied her with the melancholy face that he always saw fit to assume when playing. His hair, which he wore long, came over his coat collar and touched his silky beard. Many women had loved him, and he was still pursued by the homage of some, it was whispered. Mme. de Burne, seated near the piano, listening with all her soul, appeared at the same time to be looking at him and not to see him. Mariolle felt a little jealous: he was not jealous particularly in regard to Massival and his hostess, but beholding this rapt expression of a pretty woman fixed upon an illustrious man, he felt his vanity humiliated. This was by no means the first time he had suffered through contact with successful men at the hands of women whose favor was for many the supreme recompense.

About ten o'clock three other guests came, the Baronne de Frémines and two wealthy Jewesses. Conversation ran on an engagement just announced and a divorce that seemed imminent.

Mariolle surveyed Mme. de Burne sitting now under a lamp held aloft by a column. Her nose, slightly tip-

tilted, the dimples in her cheeks and the dainty cleft in her chin gave her face a charming, infantile gaiety, although she was approaching her thirtieth year, and although the flower-like bloom of her youth had passed and a sort of haunting look of mystery had taken its place. Under the flooding radiance of the great lamp her skin took on the peculiar shading of pale velvet and her hair glistened with tawny lights whenever she moved her head. She felt Mariolle's gaze, fixed upon her as it was from the other end of the salon, and, rising after a moment or two, she glided toward him, smiling, as if in answer to a summons.

"I'm sure you are feeling bored, monsieur," she said. "One always feels so in a house where one is not acclimatized."

He protested the reverse, of course. She took a chair next to him and immediately they began to talk. There was no hesitation, no check. It was like a match held to very dry wood; at once the flame answered. It was as if they had always known each other's opinions and sensations, as if the same nature, the same tendencies and tastes had predisposed them to understand each other and that destiny had ordained that they should meet. Perhaps some adroitness on the young woman's part contributed to bring about this state of feeling, but the delight of finding some one who listened, who grasped his meaning at once, who furnished him opportunities for repartee by her replies, inspired Mariolle. Flattered also by the manner in which he had been treated by her, captivated by the alluring grace and charm with which she knew so well how to fascinate men, he revealed that subtle wit and delicate quality of mind peculiar to him, which when perceived attracted sympathy in a powerful degree.

All at once she exclaimed:

"It is really very enjoyable to converse with you, monsieur. I had been told that it was, indeed."

He felt himself blushing and said boldly:

"While I had heard, madame, that you were——"

"A coquette," she broke in. "Well, so I am with people who please me. Everybody knows it, and I do not deny the fact; but you will find out that my coquetry is thoroughly impartial. I thus succeed in keeping my friends always about me."

She said this with a look that signified "Do not be a simpleton; keep your head; do not make the mistake of thinking you will be accorded more than others have won from me."

"You are warning me of the dangers that will beset my path here," he answered. "Thank you, madame. I am pleased at that."

She had opened to him an opportunity of speaking to her personally, and he availed himself of it. He proceeded to pay her compliments and discovered that she enjoyed this. Then he piqued her curiosity by telling her what he had heard said of her mode of life and tastes in the different sets he frequented. Although she affected a profound indifference, she could not conceal her desire to listen. He flatteringly depicted a woman of independent spirit, bright and intellectual, who had surrounded herself with men of eminence and who yet remained an accomplished and fascinating woman of society. She

protested with smiles, with faint denials, highly amused by all the details he furnished, and, with an appearance of indulging in badinage, she led him on to say more and more, questioning him wittily with an eager desire for flattery.

"She is, after all, just like all the rest," he mused, looking at her; "nothing but a mere child," and then he uttered a pretty compliment vaunting her genuine love of art, so rarely found in a woman. An unexpected shade of mockery, of that French raillery that is the essence of our race, instantly was visible in her face. Mariolle had overdone it. She showed him that she was not duped.

"Dear me," she remarked, "I really must confess that I do not feel perfectly sure whether it is art or artists that I am fond of."

"How can one love the artists without loving art?" retorted Mariolle.

"Because they are sometimes more amusing than men of society."

"Yes, but they have more inconvenient foibles."

"That's true."

"Then you do not care for music?"

She grew serious at once.

"Oh, but I do. I adore music. I think I love it better than anything else, although Massival maintains that I do not understand it."

"He said so?"

"No, but he thinks so."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, we women guess intuitively almost all that we do not know for a certainty."

"So Massival thinks that you cannot grasp music?"

"I am sure of it. I gather it by the manner alone with which he interprets it to me and the modulations, as though he were thinking: 'This is a useless piece of work, but I'll do it for you because you are a nice woman.'"

"Nevertheless, he told me that better music is heard at your house than anywhere else in Paris."

"That is true, thanks to him."

"Don't you care for literature?"

"Of course I do, and I even have the presumption to imagine that I can appreciate good literature, in spite of Lamarthe's dictum."

"Does he also think you cannot appreciate that?"

"Of course he does."

"You don't mean to say that he told you so."

"He certainly did. His theory is that, although there are to be found now and then women who have a delicate and true perception of expressed sentiments, of psychology in general, the sex is, as a whole, incapable of discerning that which is superior in his calling."

Mariolle smiled and asked: "What is your opinion on the matter, madame?"

She reflected some moments, then looking him squarely in the face to see if he were listening carefully and grasping what she answered:

"I have my own ideas on the subject," she said. "I believe that women's capacity for feeling—feeling, I say—makes their minds able to apprehend everything; only their minds do not always retain the matter grasped. Do you understand me?"

"No, not at all, madame."

"I mean by that, that in order for us to grasp anything as fully as men do, our womanly nature must be appealed to, rather than our intelligence.

We cannot feel interested in any subject presented to us by a man unless he first gains our sympathy, for we see everything through a haze of sentiment. By sentiment I do not mean love—no—through a haze of sentiment: and sentiment takes on all sorts of forms, manifestations and shades. It is something belonging specially to us. You men cannot understand it in the very least: it befogs you, while it illuminates us. Oh! I know that this is all very vague to you: so much the worse! To sum it up, if a man loves us and we care for him—this is indispensable—and if this man is a superior being he can, if he takes the trouble, make us feel, see, apprehend everything—everything; and we can, at times and in fragments, share his intellect. But this is only evanescent, for we forget—yes, we forget, just as the air forgets the words it has carried. We are intuitive and inspirational, but variable, impressionable, influenced by that which is about us. If you only knew how I recognized in my own self conditions of mind that make of me several different women, according to the weather, my state of health, what I have been reading, what people have been saying to me! There are days when I possess the soul of a blameless mother of a family—without children—and others in which my soul is almost that of a cocotte—without lovers."

Charmed, he asked:

"Do you believe that most intelligent women are capable of this mental activity?"

"Yes," she replied, "only it is dormant, almost always; and, besides, the existence custom has ordained for them forces them in different directions and determines matters for them."

"You prefer music, then, to all other arts, you say?"

"Yes. But what I have been telling you is so true! Never could I have enjoyed it as I have, never should I have adored it as I have, had it not been for that marvellous Massival. All those wonderful works of the great masters that I had heretofore passionately loved, why, he put a soul into them for me when he showed me how to interpret them. What a pity it is that he is married!"

She spoke enthusiastically, but at the same time with such profound regret that she completely corroborated her theories in regard to women and their admiration for art.

Massival was in fact a married man. He had contracted a union before his days of success, but he never spoke of his wife and she never accompanied him anywhere, and, although he had three children, the fact was known to but few.

Mariolle began to laugh. She was undeniably attractive, this woman, piquante, different from the conventional type and very pretty. He persisted in gazing with a pertinacity which did not appear to annoy her at that face both grave and gay, a little defiant, with its audacious nose, its sensuous bloom, flushed by the glorious summer of a maturity so fine, so tender, so delicious that she seemed to be at the year, the month, the very minute of her perfection. He asked himself: "Is she painted, I wonder?" and he searched for the little tell-tale line at the roots of the hair, but without discovering it. Heavy steps behind him on the carpet startled him and he turned his head. Two foot-

men were carrying in the tea-table. The little blue-flamed lamp made the water murmur softly in a great silver apparatus, shining and complicated as a chemist's apparatus.

"You will take a cup of tea?" she asked.

He said he would. She rose and walked erect, almost stiffly, toward the table where the singing vapor ascended in the midst of an array of cakes, preserved fruits and bonbons. Her silhouette clearly defined against the tapestry of the salon, Mariolle observed the slenderness of her waist and the slimness of her hips, also the beauty of the shoulders and full throat that had struck him earlier.

As he watched her trailing her skirt along the carpet he said to himself: "A siren! Everything about her is alluring!" She now went from one to the other, offering refreshments with dainty grace. Mariolle was following her with his eyes and Lamarthe, who was walking up and down with his cup and saucer in his hands, came to him and said:

"Shall we leave together?"

"Certainly."

"Let us go at once, if it is the same to you. I am tired."

They left. When they had reached the street the novelist said:

"Are you going home or to the club?"

"I am going to the club for an hour or two."

"To the 'Tambourines'?"

"Yes."

"I'll go to the door with you, but I won't go in. I always feel bored in places of that sort."

When they had gone several steps Mariolle said:

"What a peculiar woman! What do you think of her?"

Lamarthe laughed out.

"Aha! it is beginning!" he said. "You are catching it like all the rest of us; as to me, I am cured, but I have had the disease. The symptoms, my friend, consist in talking of her, nothing but her when the patients are together, whenever and wherever they meet."

"It strikes me that there is nothing surprising in my speaking of her, seeing that this is the first time we have met."

"All right. Let us talk of her. You are going to fall in love with her. It is inevitable; every one goes through it."

"She is so very bewitching?"

"Yes and no. Those who admire the women of yesterday, soulful women, women with heart and sensibility, the women one reads of in old novels, loathe her and get to detest her so much that they end by saying terrible things about her. Others, such as ourselves, to whom the modern woman appeals, are forced to confess that she is exquisite, although we do not become attached to her. This is exactly what always happens. Men do not die of love for her; they do not even suffer excessively, but they feel furious that she is not different. You will be stricken if she vouchsafes to cast the spell; indeed, I see that the charm is already beginning to work."

"Oh, I am simply the latest comer; besides, I fancy she is fond of titles."

"Yes, she certainly is not indifferent to them, and yet at the same time she laughs at them. The most famous, recherché, even the most distinguished man will not return very often to her house, if he has not found favor in

her sight; and yet she is fond of that idiot of a Fresnel and that slimy De Maltry. She becomes greatly attached to blockheads without the slightest reason for doing so; it is impossible to guess why, unless it be because they amuse her more than we do—or, perhaps, because that, at heart, they love her better than we do, and all women are more swayed by that consideration than by any other."

Lamarthe went on talking about her, analyzing her character, arguing with himself, repeating at times to contradict what he had said, interrogated by Mariolle, who listened and answered with deep interest, fascinated by the subject, a little misled, perhaps, his mind full of accurate observations and false deductions.

He said: "She is not the only one; there are fifty like her, if not more, nowadays. For instance, that little Frémines woman, whom we saw enter her house a minute ago, is another of the same kind, only bolder and married to a foreigner. Her house is one of the most amusing places to visit in Paris. I drop in there quite often."

Without perceiving how far they were wandering, they had followed the Boulevard Malesherbes, the Rue Royale, the Avenue of the Champs Elysées and were arriving at the Arc de Triomphe. Lamarthe suddenly drew out his watch:

"My dear boy," said he, "we have now been an hour and ten minutes talking about her; quite enough for to-day. I'll walk with you as far as your club another time. Go home and go to bed, and I'll do the same."

CHAPTER II

THE NET IS SPREAD

Mme. de Burne's dressing-room was a large, well-lighted apartment hung with beautiful Persian draperies imported for her by a friend, a diplomat. Their ground was yellow, a yellow like golden cream, and the design, which was in all colors, yellow predominating, consisted of bizarre-looking houses with turned-up roofs around which huge-maned lions and long-horned antelopes roamed, interspersed by gorgeous birds of paradise on the wing.

There was little furniture. Three long tables covered with plaques of green marble bore all the requisites for the toilet of a woman. On the central one were the great washbasins of heavy crystal, on the second an army of bottles, boxes and vases of all shapes, surmounted by silver tops on which were displayed a monogram and crown. On the third table were spread all the complicated and delicate instruments that modern luxury has devised for the care of the person. Besides these tables the only other pieces of furniture were two chaises-longues, luxuriously upholstered, inviting in appearance to the possessor of tired limbs. Along an entire wall was an immense mirror formed

of three panels with hinges, permitting the young woman to see herself from all points of view. To the right, in a niche usually hidden by a drapery, was a bath, a deep, green marble basin into which one descended by means of two steps. An exquisite cupid, designed by the sculptor Predole, sitting on the edge, poured in hot or cold water from the two shells with which he was playing. At the end of this retreat Venetian mirrors in the form of an arched alcove reflected the bath and the bather. A little farther on stood a desk covered with papers—letters folded up, scraps of torn envelopes bearing gilded monograms. This was where Mme. de Burne did her writing, for she lived much in this room when alone.

Day dreaming after her bath, lying back in a chaise-longue, her heavy bronze-brown hair twisted up on the top of her head, her firm, supple arms shining in the loose sleeves of her dressing-gown, she was disturbed by a soft knock at the door. Her maid entered, leaving a letter. Mme. de Burne opened it, and, having read the first few lines, dismissed the servant, saying: "I shall ring for you in an hour."

When she was alone she smiled with victorious joy. The opening words had sufficed to show her that this letter was the capitulation of Mariolle. He had resisted much longer than she had deemed possible. During the last three months she had lured him on with all the grace, the winning charm that she was capable of. Never before had she made such efforts to captivate. He seemed distrustful, on his guard against the wiles of her insatiable coquetry. There had been many *tête-à-tête* conversations, during which she had put forth all her physical allurement, all her seductive wit and many musical soirées to which they had listened together, vibrating with the same emotion, before she had been able to detect in his eye the avowal of surrender, the supplication of a soul that is vanquished. How well she knew that look! How often had she, with feline skill and unquenchable curiosity, awakened that torturing fire in the eyes of men! It amused her so to see them give in, little by little, conquered, dominated by her power, to find herself becoming the one woman on earth in their eyes, their capricious and tyrannous idol! This feeling had risen in her gradually, like an instinct developing itself, a natural instinct for war and conquest. It may have been that a germ of longing for reprisals had been planted in her heart during the years of her matrimonial bondage, a sort of vague desire to avenge herself for what she was undergoing at the hands of one man by making all others that came within her reach suffer also. She was, above all, a coquette, and as soon as she had gained her freedom she set to work to hunt for and subdue those susceptible to her charms, just as a hunter goes out in search of game, for the mere pleasure of seeing it fall. Her heart was not eager for emotion, as are the hearts of tender, sentimental women; she did not crave the exclusive love of the man nor did she seek happiness in reciprocal passion. All she wanted from those about her was admiration, homage, worship and incense. Whoever became one of the habitués of her salon had to become also the slave of her sorceries; and no one could inspire her for any length of time with inter-

est if he refused to be conquered by her coquetries, disdainful of love or perhaps worshipping elsewhere. In order to keep her friendship, it was necessary to be her captive; and in that case she lavished countless kindnesses and attentions so as to retain her prisoner. Once enrolled among her troop of adorers, a man seemed to belong to her by right of conquest. She governed her captives with wonderful skill, guided by her knowledge of their defects and virtues and by the turn their jealousy took. Too exacting admirers were punished by expulsion, and when, grown wiser, they demanded readmission, she would generally grant the boon, imposing, however, severe conditions. She took so much pleasure in this game of pitch and toss with men's hearts that she found it as interesting to bewitch old men as to turn the heads of young ones. It almost seemed as if her own degree of affection were regulated by the intensity of that which she inspired, the dull and heavy Fresnel retaining his place as a prime favorite, thanks to the frenzied passion he felt for her. She was not, however, entirely indifferent to men: she had been conscious of the beginning of impulses known only to herself that she had checked just at the moment when they might have become dangerous. Artists particularly, whose refinements of thought and subtleties of feeling she was able to comprehend, had several times agitated the surface of her heart, but, a prey to prudent fears, undecided and watchful, she had always drawn back in time. In addition to her natural caution, she saw her satellites through the eyes of the modern woman, who in a very short time denudes the greatest man of his prestige. As soon as, épris of her, they threw themselves on her mercy, they became divested of the glamour that had given them any charm in her sight, and she saw them henceforth, like all the others who had preceded them, in the guise of poor wretches who had been subjugated by her arts.

In spite of all this, she was a victim to boredom. She did not really enjoy society and only went into it through precedent. She endured the long evenings with suppressed yawns and sleepy eyelids, amused only by the mannerisms, the affectations, by her own caprices and the gratification of her restless curiosity. Never able to find relief in a real affection, she lived in a sort of gay ennui, always on the search for distraction and already weighed down by lassitude, although she deemed herself satisfied with life. What really caused her poignant satisfaction was her estimation of herself as the most seductive and eagerly sought-for woman of her time. Proud of her charm, of her irregular, bizarre and captivating order of beauty, certain of the keenness of her intelligence, which enabled her to guess, forestall and comprehend thousands of matters that others could not perceive, of her wit that so many talented men had appreciated, and ignorant of the limits that bounded her mental powers, she believed herself an almost unique being, a rare pearl existing in a mediocre world, a world that seemed to her empty and monotonous because she was too good for it. Never did she suspect for a moment that she was herself the cause of the continual ennui from which she suffered: she accused others of being

the source of her melancholy. If they were not able to distract or amuse or even inspire her with passion, it was because they were lacking in pleasing qualities. She would say laughingly: "Everybody is wearisome. The only tolerable people are those that can amuse me and simply because they can amuse me."

And the best way to please her was to succumb to her charm. Showing well that the only way to succeed in anything is to take pains, she bent all her intelligence in the direction of allurement, and nothing delighted her so much as to recognize the homage of a passion-kindled eye or wildly beating heart. She had been astounded at the difficulty encountered in the subjugation of André Mariolle, for it had been patent from the first moment that he admired her. Little by little she had succeeded in sounding that secretly envious, subtle and egotistical nature, and, laying herself out to vanquish him by peculiar attentions and preferences, aided by a natural sympathy she really felt, she had ended by attaining her end. For more than a month she had watched him, perceiving him restless, taciturn, fighting against the impulse to make the avowal. Oh, those avowals! In her heart she did not enjoy them so very much, for when they were too direct, too eager, she was forced to be cruel and rigorous. What she liked best were delicate manifestations, semi-confidences, warily expressed allusions; and she displayed marvellous tact and address in compelling from her adorers this reserve in their worship of her. For more than a month had she been awaiting from Mariolle the confession, open or ambiguous, according to the nature of the owner, by which the oppressed heart solaces itself. He had said nothing, but he had written. It was a long letter—four pages! She held it in her hands, trembling with gratification, for a moment, then, throwing herself back in her chaise-longue and dropping off her little slippers so as to be more fully at ease, she began to read. A surprise awaited her. Mariolle told her in serious words that he refused to suffer at her hands; that he already knew her too well to consent to be enrolled among her victims. In polished phraseology, through which, however, one could detect the love he was controlling, he wrote that he was aware of her manner of treating those who had grown to love her; he confessed that he had fallen under her spell, but that he meant to escape by flight from the thraldom that menaced him. He was going away. The letter was a determined and eloquent farewell.

She read and reread with ever-increasing surprise those four pages of prose. Getting up from her seat, she put on her slippers and began to pace up and down, her sleeves thrown back, displaying her bare arms, her hands thrust into the little pockets of her dressing-gown, one of them clutching the crumpled letter. Stunned by this unexpected turn of affairs, she said to herself:

"He writes remarkably well, this boy; better than Lamarthe. There is sincerity, real feeling in this; not mere sentimentality."

Feeling inclined to smoke, she went up to the table with the array of silver-crested bottles and, selecting a Dresden box, took out a cigarette; then,

having lit it, she walked over to the mirror, where she saw three pretty women appear in the three divisions. As she got quite close, she stopped short, made a slight bow and smile, a friendly little salute that meant "Very pretty—very pretty!" She inspected her eyes, bared her teeth, raised her arms, placed her hands on her hips and turned her profile so as to see herself from head to foot in the three mirrors. Remaining thus, gazing at the triple reflection of herself, she found the picture altogether charming; and enraptured at being so beautiful, she felt an egotistical and physical pleasure in it, almost as sensuous as that of a man.

Every day she was accustomed to survey herself in this manner, and her maid, who occasionally surprised her, said once to her: "Madame looks at herself so much that she will end by wearing out all the mirrors in the house." But this self-admiration was the secret of her empire over those with whom she came in contact. By cultivating to their utmost the beauty of her face and the elegance of her form, by seeking and finding out all that could possibly enhance her physical advantages, by studying the almost imperceptible movements and shades of expression that would develop the natural grace of her attitudes and gait and increase the strange attractiveness of her eyes, by learning what made her more beautiful in her own eyes, she found out how to intensify the alluring power over man that was hers by birthright.

A little tired soon, by standing still in this manner, she said to her ever-smiling image (and the image moved its lips as if in echo): "All right! We'll see, monsieur!" Then, crossing the room, she sat down at her desk.

This is what she wrote:

DEAR M. MARIOLLE: Come and see me to-morrow at four. I shall be alone, and I hope that I shall be able to reassure you as to the imaginary dangers that you dread. I call myself your friend, and I shall prove myself a sincere one.

MICHELE DE BURNE.

It was a simple toilet that she wore to receive her visitor next day, a gown of pale gray, gray with a tinge of lilac as melancholy as the twilight, very plainly made, with a high, closely fiting collar, tight sleeves, a bodice that clung to her throat and waist, and a skirt that fitted closely to her hips. When he entered, looking slightly grave, she went toward him, holding out her hands. He kissed them, then sat down, and she waited, allowing the silence that followed to last some moments, in order to assure herself of his embarrassment. He did not know what to say and waited for her to speak. At last:

"Well, let us look the matter in the face!" she exclaimed. "What has come over you? Do you know that you have written me a very insolent letter?"

"I know I have," he replied, "and I apologize to you. I am, I always have been, excessively, brutally frank. I might have gone away without making the uncalled-for and wounding explanations that I addressed to you. But I thought it more loyal to follow the dictates of my nature and to trust to your comprehending it."

"Come, come!" she broke in. "What folly is this?"

He said impetuously:

"I would rather not discuss the matter."

"But I brought you here to discuss it," she interrupted quickly in her turn, "and we shall do so until you are quite convinced that you are running no risk."

She broke into a peal of laughter, laughter like that of a very young girl, and her simple gown, so like that of a convent girl, made the laugh seem all the more natural.

"I wrote you the truth, the absolute truth," he stammered, "the simple truth about myself."

"I know it," she answered, becoming serious. "This happens with all my friends. You wrote that I am an abominable coquette. I know that I am, but what then? No one dies in consequence; I don't believe that any one even suffers. Of course there is what Lamarthe calls 'the crisis.' That is what you are undergoing now, but it soon passes, and then comes—what shall I call it?—a sort of chronic condition which does not cause pain and which I just keep alive so that I may retain the fidelity, devotion and attachment of my friends. Now what do you think of me? Am I not candid and sincere? How many women have you met who would dare to say to a man what I have just said to you?"

She spoke with a quaint and determined air and with such simplicity and yet earnestness that he could not help smiling. "All your other friends," said he, "are men who have already passed through the fire, even before meeting you. Scorched and grilled, they were able to bear with equanimity the furnace in which you placed them; but as far as I am concerned, madame, I have never been through that ordeal. And I have for some time past realized that it will be terrible if I allow myself to yield to the feeling that is developing in my heart."

She became familiar in her manner suddenly, and bending toward him, her hands crossed upon her knees, she said:

"Now, listen! I am speaking in all good faith. I hate to think that I am going to lose a friend simply on account of a chimerical fear. Supposing you should love me; the men of the present day do not love the women of this period so intensely as to suffer any harm from it. Believe me, I am speaking of what I know well."

She remained silent a moment and then went on with the peculiar smile of a woman who is speaking the truth, but who believes she is lying:

"At any rate, I am not the sort of woman to be adored passionately. I am too modern. I shall be your friend, your pretty little friend, for whom you will feel affection—but nothing more than affection—I shall see to that."

Then, in a more serious tone, she added:

"In any case, I warn you that I am incapable of really loving any one, no matter whom; that I shall treat you just like the others, never any better. I have a horror of jealous men and tyrants. I was compelled to endure the despotism of a husband, but I do not care, with a mere friend, to put up with the affectionate tyranny which mars cordial relations. You see, I am hiding nothing from you, that I speak to you as a comrade. Do you accept the rôle of a loyal friend that I propose to you? If not, it is not too late: you can withdraw, whatever be the gravity of

your case. There is safety in flight, you know."

He looked at her, already won by the magic of her voice, by the intoxication of her personality. He murmured, vibrating with a sense of her proximity:

"I accept the conditions, madame; and if harm comes, so much the worse for me. You are worth running the risk for."

She stopped him as he was going to say more:

"No, that is enough," she said. "Let us never mention this again."

She went on to chat on indifferent matters. An hour later he left in torture, for he really loved her, and with joy in his heart because he had promised her that he would not withdraw.

CHAPTER III

QUESTIONINGS

He was in torture because he loved her. Unlike the vulgar crowd to whom the chosen one of their heart appears surrounded by an aureole of perfection, he had grown to love her, although watching her with the clear-seeing eyes of a man who had never before known what love is. His unquiet, penetrating mind, always on the defensive, had preserved him from the influence of turbulent passions. A few intrigues, two short liaisons cut short by ennui, and some successful love-passages, soon ended in disgust—such had been the romantic experiences of Mariolle. He considered woman as a useful institution for such men as required a well-kept house and children or as a pleasant toy for such as desired the pastime of love-making.

In going to Mme. de Burne's he had been warned against her by the confidences of his friends. What he knew of her interested, puzzled and attracted him, while at the same time it rather repelled him.

On principle he disapproved of players who did not play the game. After a few interviews he discovered that she was extremely interesting and invested with strong magnetic charm. The physical personality of this fair woman, who was at the same time plump and slim, with her superb arms, that looked as if made for embraces, and her long, slender body, that seemed made for flight, appeared to him a symbol of vain hopes. Moreover, he had experienced in his intercourse with her a pleasure he never could have believed possible in conversing with a mere society woman. Endowed with wit marked by spontaneity and unexpectedness, satirical with an irony that did not sting, she at times allowed herself to be influenced by romantic and even sentimental considerations, showing that beneath her mocking brilliancy there existed a fund of poetic tenderness, and this touch of inconsistency made her very captivating.

She made herself exceedingly agree-

able to Mariolle, desiring to add him to her list of victims; and he visited her as often as he could, feeling attracted by her more and more as time went on. A sort of power seemed to emanate from her, drawing him to her: a power made up of smiles, glances and words; and yet he often went from her presence with a feeling of irritation at something she had said or done. The more he felt himself enveloped by this mysterious magnetism, the more he fathomed and comprehended her nature, ardently wishing she were different. Still the very characteristics that he disliked in her were the ones that allured him more effectively than her better qualities. Her coquetry, as openly carried on as the toying with a fan by other women, her way of taking nothing seriously which had at first attracted, but now made him uneasy, her constant longing for excitement and novelty, at times exasperated him so much that he would, on leaving her, resolve to discontinue his visits gradually. But the next day he would inevitably find some pretext to return to her. What he felt more and more acutely as his infatuation increased was the insecurity of her affection and the reality of his suffering. He sank deeper and deeper in his obsession, like a man drowning from fatigue, whose boat has foundered far from shore. He was not blind; he knew her exactly as she was, the prescience of his passion having endowed him with clear-sightedness. Still he could not keep himself from constantly thinking about her.

With tireless persistency he kept analyzing her character, seeking to penetrate the depths of that inscrutable feminine soul, that incomprehensible mixture of gay intelligence and triviality, of affection and inconstancy, of judgment and childishness, that astounding blend of contradictory traits.

How was it that she maintained this empire over him? He asked himself this question over and over again. He could not understand how, for with his reflective, observant and proudly modest nature it was to have been expected that he would have been attracted by a woman with the old-fashioned virtues of tender gentleness and faithful affection. But he encountered in this one a kind of new departure from the old order of things, a being excitingly original, one of those women who are the pioneers of a new generation, essentially different from their predecessors, and who diffuse around them, even by their faults, the powerful attraction of a newly awakening force. After the dreamy and passionate women of the Restoration came the pleasure-loving daughters of the Empire—and here was another type of the protean yet eternal feminine, a creature of refined sensibility, of restless, irresolute nature, who gave the idea of having been under the influence of all the narcotics that soothe or madden the nervous centres—under chloroform that stuns, under ether and morphine that lash the imagination, blunt the intelligence and dull the emotions. He saw in her a being created to charm; a gem, exquisite and delicate, satisfying his eye, making his heart throb, exciting his longings—just as delicious and appetizing viands exhibited behind a plate-glass window tantalize the hunger of a starving passer-by.

Perceiving that he was falling down the slope of an abyss, he began to reflect with terror on his situation. What

would happen? What would she do? She would do precisely as she had done with all the rest—bring him to that condition in which a man obeys the caprices of a woman slavishly, as a dog follows the steps of his master, and then she would catalogue him in the list of her more or less valued favorites. But had she really treated all the others in this way? Had there never been an exception for whom she had truly cared for a month, a day, an hour, in one of those transports, so quickly repressed, to which her soul was subject?

He discussed her interminably with these others as they came away together from her dinners. He could see that they were still agitated, discontented, nervous—their emotions unsatisfied. No, she had certainly never loved any of those drawing-room celebrities; therefore he, he who had never done aught to cause people to turn their heads or stare when he entered a salon or mingled in a crowd—what would he be in her eyes? Nothing—a mere nonentity, one who in the eyes of a brilliant woman becomes a sort of tame cat: an adjunct, useful and without flavor, like the vin ordinaire one uses with water at meals. If he had made himself a name he might have accepted this rôle; his renown would have made it less humiliating; but, as it was, he would have none of it, and so he sent her the letter of adieu. When he received her brief reply he was as overwhelmed as if some great boon had been accorded him, and when she made him promise that he would not forsake her, he was as happy as if he had been delivered from some peril.

Several days passed without anything occurring. But when the calm—the lull that follows a storm—was over he felt, awakening in intensified violence, the passion that was devouring him. He had said that he would never again broach the subject to her; but he had not promised never to write, and one evening, when he was kept from sleep by the insomnia of a lover, he sat down, almost in defiance of himself, and began to commit to paper an expression of his sufferings. It was not a letter; it was a collection of disjointed notes and phrases—throes of anguish transmuted into words. This soothed him: he felt relieved, and going to bed, found he was able to sleep.

Next morning he read over what he had written, and putting the sheets of paper in an envelope, posted them to Mme. de Burne. He fancied that this document would not displease her: all women regard a sincere love-letter with favor and infinite indulgence. Toward evening he went to her house, wondering how he would be received and what she would say to him. He found M. de Pradon there, smoking cigarettes and chatting with his daughter. Sometimes he passed hours in this way, for he treated her less like a child than a friend. She had introduced into their friendship a tinge of the homage which she exacted from him as she did from everybody else.

When she saw Mariolle come in a flash of pleasure illumined her face; she held out her hand eagerly and her smile said: "I am glad to see you!"

He hoped that the father would soon take his leave. But M. de Pradon did not go. In spite of his confidence in his daughter, he always watched her with a singular anxiety that was almost marital. This time he was inspired with

curiosity to see how this new friend of hers would succeed; whether he was likely to have more luck than the others, what he was like, if he amounted to anything. Would he get his congé or would he become a member of the band of intimates? So he stayed on, and Mariolle soon realized that there was no hope of his departure. He decided, therefore, to make a friend of him, judging wisely that an ally in the camp might prove a useful auxiliary.

So he laid himself out to be agreeable, and succeeded in being gay and amusing, exhibiting none of the symptoms of an unhappy lover. Mme. de Burne said to herself: "He is a clever fellow and acts comedy to perfection." And M. de Pradon thought: "Now, this is a level-headed young man; my daughter does not make a fool of him as she does so many of the others." So when Mariolle saw fit to take his leave, he left them both delighted with him.

But he came out of that house in deep distress of mind. While with this woman he realized the hold she had upon him, he felt that he should knock in vain at that heart, like a prisoner beating his fists in despair upon an iron door. He was most irretrievably enmeshed—there was no use in trying to escape from her; so, recognizing the futility of flight, he made up his mind to be wary, patient, cunning, tenacious: to conquer this woman by means of skill, by that homage for which she had so insatiable a longing, by the adoration that delighted her soul and by the voluntary servitude that she had reduced him to. His letter had pleased her. He would write again. He did write. Almost every night, on getting home, at the hour when the mind, excited by the events of the day, sees everything in an exaggerated form, he sat down at his writing-table and began to think of her. The super-excited ardor of his mind and his overwrought imagination sent forth words like sparks from a fire. Almost daily he wrote letters that seemed to consume his own heart, so intense was the fervor they breathed: for passionate letters of this kind are often more dangerous to the composer than to the recipient.

By working himself up to this state of effervescence, by exciting his brain with words and dwelling constantly upon one unchanging theme, he grew to lose, little by little, the notion of reality in connection with this woman. Ceasing to see her as she had appeared to him at first, he ended by being able to see her only through the medium of his pen; and what he wrote night after night became to him a series of truths. This daily labor of idealization held her up to him in the guise in which she had appeared in his dreams of what she ought to be. His former resistance also fell before the evident affection that Mme. de Burne now showed him: for at this time, although no word had passed between them, there was no doubt that she preferred him to any other, and openly manifested her favor.

He thought with a sort of ecstasy of hope that she might end by loving him some day. She was influenced in a peculiar manner by the power of his letters. Never had any one offered such worship and adulation as were conveyed in them and at the same time maintained the reserved attitude of Mariolle. Never had any of her adorers conceived this delicious idea of send-

ing up to her bedside every morning by her maid, on a silver salver, this heavenly breakfast of sentiment in a paper envelope. What made it more effective was that he never mentioned the letters, seemed to ignore them, and remained to all appearance the most self-contained of her admirers, making no allusion to this daily torrent of adoration. She had, of course, received letters of this nature from others, but in quite another tone—more pressing, more audacious. For three months, the duration of the "crisis," Lamarthe had sent her a series of them, the clever, caressing love-letters of a literary man truly épris, the series ending only when he realized the hopelessness of his suit.

Mariolle's differed from Lamarthe's in their concentration of feeling, their sincerity of expression, their submission and devotion, and Mme. de Burne read them with a pleasure that no other writings had ever given her. Her friendship for him deepened, and she showed him increasing favor the more she perceived his absolute discretion. She keenly relished the originality of the situation. Up to this time she had been able, in spite of her vanity, to discern rival preoccupations in all the hearts disturbed by her; she had never reigned absolutely; there had always been chambers where she could not enter. Jealous of music with Massival, of literature with Lamarthe, she now met for the first time a being to whom she was all in all. The portly Fresnel had assuredly loved her as devotedly, but then he was the portly Fresnel. She felt a kind of selfish gratitude to Mariolle for according her this triumph. A wish for his constant presence now began to beset her, a desire for his regard, his complete subjugation. Although he did not offer her the flattery that others tendered her, he flattered her more by indirect means, by ministering to the attributes that govern the heart and spirit of a coquette—her pride of conquest and her desire for mastery. Like a monarch annexing a new country, she encroached upon his life by a series of small invasions day by day, organizing fêtes, theatre parties, restaurant dinners; she dragged him at her chariot wheels continually, no longer able to exist without him, or, rather, without the incense of the vassalage to which he was reduced.

He submitted, happy in his captivity, caressed by her eyes, her voice, her caprices. Life now to him was one long transport of intoxicating desire.

CHAPTER IV

AVRANCHES

Mariolle had just come and was waiting for Mme. de Burne, who had not yet returned, although she had sent him a despatch that morning asking him to call.

In that salon he always felt, despite his desire to be there and his keen appreciation of all that was beautiful

in it, a sort of enervation and oppression that prevented him from sitting down and feeling at ease when his hostess was not present. He walked up and down in blissful expectation, tempered by a dread that some unforeseen obstacle should prevent her arrival and so postpone their meeting till the next day. When he heard the wheels of a carriage stop at the door, he quivered with hope that became certainty when the apartment bell sounded.

She came in, with her hat on her head, an unusual thing for her to do, and looked joyful and hurried.

"I have a piece of news for you," she announced. "I am going away to the country."

His face fell.

"Oh! And you tell me a thing like that as if it were good news!"

"Yes. Sit down and I'll tell you all about it. You may or you may not know that M. Valsaci, my mother's brother, is a civil engineer and bridge builder and has a place at Avranches. He spends a great part of his time there, with his wife and children. Every summer we go and visit them there. Now, this summer I did not care to go, and this vexed him and he made a fuss about it to papa. Apropos of this, I must tell you that papa is jealous of you, and is always telling me that I am compromising myself with you. I'm afraid that you'll have to come here less often, but don't worry over this—I shall arrange matters. Well, to resume, papa gave me a scolding and made me promise to go to Avranches for ten or twelve days. We're going to leave on Tuesday morning. What do you say to this?"

"I say that you are breaking my heart."

"Is that all?"

"Well, what can I say or do? I can't prevent you from going."

"You don't see anything that can be done? Well, I do. Avranches is very near Mont St. Michel. Have you ever been to Mont St. Michel?"

"No, madame."

"Very well. Next Friday you will become inspired with a desire to behold that marvel. On your way you will stop at Avranches, say on Saturday, and about sundown you will be walking up and down in the public gardens that overlook the bay. We shall meet by chance. Papa will be very angry, but that does not matter. I will get up a party to go the next day to visit the Abbey—all of us together. You must be enthusiastic over the idea and make yourself extremely agreeable, as you are an adept at doing when you wish. You must make a favorable impression on my aunt and invite us all to dinner at the hotel. We will all stay there that night, and you can return next day via St. Malo. Eight days later I shall be back in Paris. Is not this a fine plan? Am I not nice to you?"

He murmured:

"You are what I love best on earth!"

"Hush!" she exclaimed.

For several moments they stood gazing at each other. She smiled up at him—a smile of sincere gratitude and sympathy, and he looked down with eyes that devoured her; he wanted to fall at her feet and roll there, to bite the hem of her skirt, to shout aloud: he yearned to express to her the passion that tortured him from his heels to his head, his soul as well as his body. He felt horribly sad because he could not avow to her his love, his inexpres-

sible and delicious love. She knew all about it, though, without his expressing it, just as a good marksman knows when his bullet has hit the bull's eye. There was not a fibre in that man's frame that did not vibrate at her bidding; he was more her possession than she herself was. So she felt glad and said to herself that he was charming.

"Then it's all arranged—we'll make the expedition?" she asked good-humoredly.

"Yes, madame—it's all arranged," he answered, his voice husky with emotion. After a moment's pause she said: "I mustn't detain you any longer to-day. I just came in to tell you about this, as we are leaving the day after to-morrow. I shall be engaged all day to-morrow and I have still four or five calls to pay to-day before dinner."

He rose at once, his heart heavy, for his one desire was never to leave her. He kissed her hand and took his leave.

Four long days followed, days which he passed alone, preferring silence to voices, solitude to his friends. On Saturday morning he took the eight o'clock express. He had scarcely slept, feverish with the expectation of the journey. His dark, silent room, in which the only sound heard was that of the rolling by of fiacres, oppressed him like a prison.

As soon as the first light filtered through his curtains he jumped out of bed and scanned the sky—fears of bad weather had been haunting him. The sky promised a fine day. A light mist floated, presaging heat. He dressed much sooner than was necessary, being ready two hours too soon, chafing with impatience to be out of the house and on his way. He sent his servant to fetch a cab before his toilet was completed, dreading his not being able to find one. The first jolting of the vehicle filled him with satisfaction, but when he entered the Montparnasse station he was disgusted to find that he had fifty minutes to wait. Finding an empty carriage, he paid for the whole of it, so that he might dream undisturbed by fellow passengers. As soon as he felt the train gliding out with soft, even motion, his impatience, instead of being allayed, became more intense, and he felt an insane impulse to accelerate its pace by pushing on the cushioned partition in front of him. When Argentan was passed the verdure of the Norman landscape attracted him. The train was passing through an undulating country, with fertile valleys in which the peasants' habitations, their pastures and orchards were enclosed by rows of great trees whose tufted heads shone in the rays of the sun. It was toward the end of July, the season during which this part of France is at the height of its vitality and bloom.

In all the fields separated by those leafy walls enormous oxen, cows with glaring patches of white in vague, bizarre designs on their flanks, reddish bulls, with big, curly foreheads, looking fierce and aggressive, succeeded each other indefinitely as the train rushed along this fresh, rich country, whose soil seemed to exude cider and beeves. Here and there a river would be seen winding along at the foot of poplars under a thin veil of willows or a stream would flash out from the grass, disappearing to show itself again unexpectedly a few moments later. Mariolle

was distracted from his impatience by this rapid and continuous panorama of a lovely park diversified by orchards and herds. But when he had changed train at Folligny the overmastering desire to arrive took possesion of him again, and during the last forty minutes he looked at his watch at least twenty times. At last he beheld, perched on a hill they were approaching, the city where she was awaiting him. The train was late, and only an hour separated him from the moment when they were to meet by chance on the public promenade.

As he alighted from the train he found an omnibus standing in readiness. It began to climb slowly the steep road leading to Avranches, which occupies the summit of a hill, and from a distance has rather the appearance of a fortress. Nearer it is seen to be an ancient and pretty Norman town, with small, regular houses, almost all alike, crowded one against the other, with a look of ancient pride and modest ease, a countrified and mediæval air.

As soon as Mariolle had thrown his suit case into his bedroom at the hotel he asked to be shown the street leading to the botanical gardens. He hurried along it, although he was too early, trusting that some happy accident might have caused her to arrive before the time. But as soon as he reached the gate he perceived that the gardens were almost empty. Three old men were walking up and down, old shop-keepers, natives evidently, who no doubt came every day to spend their evenings there together, and a family of English boys and girls, with long legs like colts, were playing around a blonde nursery governess who seemed to be day-dreaming. Mariolle, with beating heart, walked on, scrutinizing every alley as he came to it. He reached a wide avenue lined with leafy trees that seemed to stretch across the gardens, dividing them into two parts. Passing through this, he approached a terrace that faced the horizon and was completely carried away by what he beheld.

At the foot of the hill on whose summit he was standing spread an apparently interminable plain of sand which merged itself in the distance into the sea and the sky. A river meandered along this plain, and here and there under the flaming light of the sun pools of water diversified the sand like luminous plates of burnished metal. In the middle of the vast expanse of sand, still moist with the receding tide, there arose, twelve or fifteen kilometers from the shore, a monumental crag, surmounted by a cathedral. In all those immense dunes it had but one neighbor, Tombelaine, on a rock with its rounded back, squatting amid its quicksands. Farther in the distance, on the surface of the shimmering water, could be discerned the tops of submerged rocks; and, the eye pursuing to the right its journey, discovered at the edge of the sandy waste the vast green extent of Norman country, so covered with trees that it looked like an illimitable forest. This scene at one glance revealed Nature under two aspects—one of grandeur and sublimity, the other of freshness and grace, and one's gaze turned from this vision of forests to the vision of the granite mount with its wonderful Gothic structure, the lonely inhabitant of these limitless sands.

Mariolle had before now thrilled

under the strange surprises that foreign lands offer to travellers, but this time the shock was so sudden that he stood rooted to the spot, his soul awed and softened. After some moments the clanging of a bell called him back to things mundane and to the feeling of happy expectancy that now animated him.

The gardens were almost always empty. The three old gentlemen still promenaded the paths, but the English children had disappeared. Mariolle began to walk up and down. She would soon be here now; he would see her at the end of one of the paths leading to the wonderful terrace. What bliss! He felt her close at hand, somewhere near, not to be found or seen yet, but thinking of him, knowing that they would meet soon. He almost uttered a cry. A blue sunshade was visible among the trees. That was she—he knew. A little boy appeared, trundling a hoop in front of him, then two ladies, next two men, M. de Pradon and another. She was all in blue, a blue like the sky in spring. He recognized her, although he could not distinguish her features. He did not dare to go forward and meet her, knowing he would blush and stammer, that he could not satisfactorily explain this accidental meeting under the cold, suspicious eye of M. de Pradon. Still he walked on, his eyeglass raised to scan the horizon. As he approached them she called out, not even taking the trouble to feign surprise at this rencontre: "How do you do, M. de Mariolle! Isn't the view superb?"

Bewildered by this greeting, scarcely knowing what part to play, he stammered:

"Ah! is that you, madame? What a fortunate accident! I wished to see this admirable country, and so——"

"And so you chose the very time when I was here! How very nice of you!" and then she proceeded to introduce her friends to each other.

"One of my great friends, M. de Mariolle—my aunt, Mme. Valsaci; my uncle, the bridge builder."

She contrived that he should walk between herself and her aunt; then, shooting at him a very rapid glance, asked:

"What do you think of this part of the country?"

"I don't think I ever saw anything more beautiful," he answered.

"Oh, but if you had been here as long as I have you would realize how this place influences you! The going out and coming in of the sea on those sands, that restless movement that never ceases, bathing the whole expanse twice a day and so quickly that a galloping horse cannot escape from it. This wonderful sight that is free to all moves me inexpressibly; really, I am quite carried away by it. Am I not, aunt?"

Mme. Valsaci, a ladylike woman of mature years, with silvery hair, the wife of a civil engineer of good standing, acknowledged that she had never seen her niece so moved by anything before. Then she added, after reflection:

"It is not surprising, though, when one remembers that she scarcely ever sees or admires any scenery except that at the theatres."

"But I go to Dieppe and Trouville almost every year!"

The elder lady laughed:

"One goes to Dieppe and Trouville just to meet one's friends. The sea is

placed there simply for bathers who make rendezvous."

This was said very ingenuously, perhaps without any arrière-pensée. They returned to the terrace: it drew their steps irresistibly—in spite of themselves they always found that they were heading toward it, just as balls roll down a slope. The descending sun was weaving a curtain of transparent cloth of gold behind the silhouette of the Abbey, which grew darker and darker, looking like a gigantic reliquary under a golden veil. But Mariolle saw nothing except the adorable, blonde face enveloped in a cloud of blue at his side. She was changed, somehow, yet never had he seen her look so deliciously fresh and radiant, with a freshness that seemed to pervade her eyes, her hair, her entire body and even her soul; a freshness drawn from this lovely country, its sky, its clear light and verdure. Never had he felt he loved her so deeply. He walked on beside her, finding nothing to say. The contact of her dress, the occasional jostling of her arm against his, the eloquent interchange of glances annihilated him completely, just as if they had deprived him of his personality. He felt himself becoming destroyed by the proximity of this woman, absorbed by her until there remained nothing of himself—nothing but a longing, an appeal and adoration. She had done away with his former self, just as she would have reduced a letter to thin ashes in the flames.

She was fully aware of this complete victory, and touched by it, vibrating and tender, more alive to all emotional influences in this vital air so full of the sea and the sap of the land, she said, without looking at him:

"I am so glad to see you!" Then added immediately: "How long are you going to stay?"

"Two days—counting to-day as one."

Then, turning to the aunt, he said: "Will you and M. Valsaci do me the honor to come and spend the day with me to-morrow at Mont St. Michel?"

Mme. de Burne answered for her relative:

"I shan't allow her to refuse—since we have been so lucky as to meet you here." The engineer's wife added:

"Yes, monsieur, we shall be very pleased to go, provided you come and take dinner with us this evening."

He bowed and accepted. Suddenly he became conscious of a delirious joy, a joy like that that takes possession of one on receiving news of a great piece of good fortune, ardently longed for. But what had he obtained? What important event had occurred in his life? None. And yet he felt himself carried away by this intoxication of an indefinable presentiment. They promenaded for a long time on the terrace, waiting to see the sun go down, to gaze until the last moment at the silhouette of the Mont projected against the fiery horizon. They chatted now on ordinary topics, such as could be discussed in the presence of a third person, from time to time exchanging stolen glances. Then, the sun disappearing, they wended their way to the villa of the Valsacis, situated in the suburbs and surrounded by beautiful grounds overlooking the bay.

Desiring to be prudent, and worried, moreover, by the cold and almost hostile attitude of M. de Pradon, Mariolle left early. When he was bending over the hand of Mme. de Burne to kiss it

in parting salutation, she murmured with a peculiar intonation: "A demain —à demain!"

Immediately after his departure, M. and Mme. Valsaci, who kept early hours, proposed that all should go to bed.

"You go," said Mme. de Burne. "As for me, I shall go and take a turn in the garden."

"I shall too," remarked her father.

She went out wrapped in a shawl, and they began to walk up and down the white sand of the garden paths, which, in the bright moonlight, looked like little rivers meandering between the turf and flower beds. After a long silence M. de Pradon said in a low tone:

"My dear child, you will do me the justice to allow that I have never troubled you with any advice."

She had felt it coming, and was ready with an answer:

"I beg pardon, papa. You did once give me a piece of advice."

"I?"

"Yes, you. And very bad advice it was. Therefore I am fully determined, if you ever give me any more, not to follow it."

"What advice did I ever give you?"

"You advised me to marry M. de Burne. That was a piece of advice that proved to be wanting in judgment, clear-sightedness and in knowledge of men in general and of your daughter in particular."

He kept silence for some minutes, rather surprised and embarrassed, then:

"Yes, I made a mistake that time," he acknowledged. "But I am quite sure that I am making no mistake in the paternal advice that I am now about to offer."

"Well, let me hear it, then, papa."

"You are on the point of compromising yourself——"

She began to laugh—a little laugh that came too quickly.

"With M. Mariolle, no doubt?"

"With M. Mariolle."

"You forget, papa," she rejoined, "that according to you I have compromised myself with M. Georges de Maltry, M. de Lamarthe, M. Massival and half a dozen others of whom you have been jealous, for I never can accept the least attention from an agreeable and attached friend without all my troop bursting into fury, you at their head; you who——"

"No, no," he broke in. "You have never compromised yourself with any one. On the contrary, you are most tactful in your relations with all your friends."

"Dear papa, I am no longer a little girl," she answered vexedly. "I promise that I shall not compromise myself with M. Mariolle any more than I did with the rest. You need not be afraid. But I acknowledge that I did ask him to come here. I like him; he is just as clever as any of our other friends and much less egotistical. You used to say this, too, until you discovered that I had a slight predilection in his favor. And since M. Mariolle is agreeable to me, I thought it would be pleasant if we could all make a little excursion together. It is foolish to deprive one's self of pleasure when there is no harm nor danger in it. How can I run any risk of being compromised if you are there as well?" She laughed frankly now, knowing that every word she had said had told, and he remained silent, irritated, displeased and embarrassed.

"Don't worry," she went on. "What can there be more proper at this season of the year than to make a trip to Mont St. Michel with my father, my uncle, my aunt and a friend? And, in any case, who will know of it? Once we are back again in Paris, M. Mariolle will be relegated to his place with the others once more."

"Very well," said her father. "Let it be as if I had not spoken."

They walked up and down a little longer, then M. de Pradon said:

"Shall we go in? I am tired and want to go to bed."

"No," answered she, "I want to stay out longer, the night is so beautiful."

"Then don't go far," her father warned. "One never knows whom one may meet."

"Oh, I shall stay right under the windows."

He kissed her on the forehead and went in. She sat down on a little bench at the foot of an oak. The night was warm, full of exhalations from the earth, mingled with the smell of the sea. A misty light now hovered over everything, for the bay in the moonlight was shrouded in a veil of mist that rose like white smoke, hiding the dunes, now covered by the rising tide. Mme. de Burne, her hands crossed, her eyes fixed on the distance, tried to look into her soul through a fog as impenetrable as that overhanging the sands. Many a time in her dressing-room in Paris had she, sitting in this attitude, asked herself:

"What do I love? What do I desire? What do I hope for? What do I wish? What am I?"

Apart from the pleasure that she felt in her own personality and the intense desire to please, she had never experienced any vivid emotion, except now and then a fleeting feeling of curiosity, quickly dying out. She was well aware of this, being too much in the habit of closely studying her face and all her person not to have observed her soul also. Up to now she had merely felt a vague interest in other people, incapable as they were of inspiring her with passion, capable at the most of amusing her. And yet, when she had felt awakening in her a preference for any one, when any rival disputing with her the possession of an admirer roused her feminine instincts in favor of him and caused to spring to birth a feeling of attachment, she had discovered in these false impulses of love a pleasure much more acute than the gratification of ambition. Still these preferences always withered and died. Why? She grew wearied, disgusted—perhaps because she was too clear-sighted. Everything that had at first attracted her to a man, everything that had animated and allured her soon began to appear hackneyed, tiresome, banal. All men were so similar—without being identical in disposition. No man she had ever met appeared endowed with attributes calculated to retain affection or inspire love.

Was it their fault or hers? Were they lacking in what she required or was she without the power to love? Do human beings love because they meet others created with the qualities that satisfy wants inherent in themselves or do they love simply because they are born with the faculty of loving? Sometimes it seemed to her as if other people's hearts were endowed with arms, arms tender and outstretched to draw,

to clasp and embrace, and that her heart was different; it had only eyes, no arms. How often she had noticed men of undoubted talent and other fine attributes falling in love with girls unworthy of them, silly, worthless, even plain girls. How did this happen and why? It was a mystery. It could not be due to any providential intervention, this crisis in the lives of beings, but to some germ that was communicated and developed instantly. She had listened to confidences, she had surprised secrets, she had even seen with her own eyes the sudden transfiguration of the soul that accompanies this intoxication, and she had pondered much over these things.

In society, in the constant round of visits, teas, dinners and other idiocies by means of which the leisure classes kill time, she had discovered, with jealous, envious and almost incredulous surprise, beings, both men and women, in whom something unusual was the result of this influence. It did not manifest itself in any striking manner, but with her restless penetration she had felt and divined it. The faces of those under the spell betrayed them; their voices, their smiles, above all their eyes, by a something inexpressible, indescribable: a delicious happiness, a joy of the soul overflowing into the body and illuminating it. Lovers irritated her, she knew not why. She recognized and saw through them like a flash and with unerring penetration, often detecting intrigues long before society even suspected them.

When she mused over the tender folly into which the existence of another being can lure us, the agitation, the bliss which the sight of him, his voice, his touch can evoke, she felt certain that she could never experience love. Still, when wearied of all around her, beset by indefinable yearnings, tormented by a gnawing desire for change and novelty, that was perhaps nothing but a vague hungering for affection, she had sometimes wished with a secret shame born of her pride that she might meet some man who could inspire her, if only for a little time, a few months, with that bewitching ecstasy of mind and body. Life under those conditions seemed to be invested with such a wonderful light of happiness. Not only had she wished for this meeting—she had even tried to make it happen—with that indolent energy that made her so seldom persist in any enterprise.

All those beginnings of attraction toward men said to be possessed of exceptional attributes who dazzled her for perhaps a few weeks ended in disillusion. She expected too much of them —of their nature, their character, their delicacy of mind. After each of these disappointments she was forced to acknowledge that the defects of eminent men were more salient than their good qualities: that talent is a special gift, like good sight or a sound digestion, a gift pertaining to the studio, an isolated gift, bearing no relation to those personal traits which make association with the possessor attractive and agreeable.

Since she had met Mariolle she found that she felt peculiarly drawn toward him. Did she love him? Was this love? Without prestige, without renown, he had conquered her by force of his affection, his tenderness, his loyalty, by all the true and simple traits of his character. He had conquered her, for she thought of him continually, she desired

his presence continually; no other being she had ever met was so agreeable, so sympathetic, so indispensable to her. Was this love?

She did not feel that burning emotion that she had heard described, but for the first time in her life she experienced a sincere desire to be for a man something more than a fascinating woman. Did she love him? In order to love was it necessary that the object should be invested with exceptional attractions, different from and above all other men's? That he should exist in that aureole of light with which the heart surrounds the adored one? Or was it sufficient that he should please you very much—so much that you could scarcely do without him?

In this latter case she loved Mariolle, or, at least, she was very near to loving him. After reflecting earnestly for a long time, she concluded: "Yes, I love him no doubt, but I am deficient in emotion; it is a lack in my make-up."

And yet she had been conscious of a thrill of feeling when she saw him coming toward her on the terrace of the garden that evening. For the first time she had experienced that indescribable impulse that draws one human being to another. She had felt pleasure in walking near him, in having him near her, vibrating with love for her, in watching by his side the sun setting behind Mont St. Michel, that sight that seems like a vision described in a legend. Love itself, was it not a sort of legend of the soul—a legend believed in by some from instinct, in the case of others simply because by always dwelling on it they grow to have faith in it? Would this be the way with her? She had felt a strange desire to lay her head on the shoulder of this man, to be close to him. Yes, she had felt differently toward him, compared with what she felt toward others, and she felt so now, at this moment, at the bottom of her heart. Perhaps she needed to yield to this impulse a little for it to become the real thing. She always resisted too much, she reasoned too much, she fought against the charm of others. Would it not be sweet on such a night as this to wander with him under the willows beside the river and to recompense him fully for his devotion by offering him her lips from time to time?

The window opened. She turned her head: it was her father, who was no doubt looking for her. She cried:

"You're not asleep yet?"

"If you don't come in, you'll catch cold!" he answered.

She got up and went into the house. When she had gained her room, she pushed back the curtains to look out at the mist growing whiter and whiter in the moonlight, and it seemed to her that the mist in her heart was being dissipated by the dawn of this new tenderness.

She slept well, however, and was awakened by her maid early, for they were to start immediately after breakfast so as to take luncheon at the Mount.

A drag came for them. Hearing the wheels grate on the gravelled drive, she leaned out of the window and immediately her eyes met those of André Mariolle, searching for hers. Her heart began to beat fast. She was surprised at the new and strange sensation of that muscle that throbs and pumps the blood more energetically at the prox-

imity of certain beings. Again she repeated the words that had been on her lips in dropping off to sleep: "Am I really going to love him?" When she came face to face with him she felt that he was so dead in love with her that she longed to clasp him in her arms and offer him her lips. One glance only they exchanged, but that sufficed to make him turn pale with happiness.

The vehicle started on its way. It was a bright summer morning, full of radiance and the songs of birds. Down the hill, across the river and through the villages they went by a stony road that jolted them up and down on the seats of the drag. Mme. de Burne, after some time, began to joke her uncle on the condition of the roads, and this broke the ice, and every one began to talk and laugh. Suddenly, in emerging from a hamlet, the bay came into view, not an expanse of yellow sand as on the previous evening, but a sheet of glittering water, the sands, the salt meadows and even the road itself farther on, the driver informed them.

For the next hour they went on slowly, so as to allow time for the tide to turn. Rows of elms and oaks dividing the fields from one another now hid from time to time the great outline of the Abbey, mounted on its pedestal of rock, at the present moment in the midst of the waters; then it would reappear suddenly, larger and more impressive the nearer they approached.

Michèle de Burne and André Mariolle gazed upon it with increasing awe and admiration; then their glances met. The poetry of this vision, bathed in the soft radiance of the July morning, appealed to them both.

They chatted with friendly ease. Mme. Valsaci related tragic incidents that had occurred in this locality, men swallowed up without warning by quicksands, others overtaken by the tide. Her husband was defending the embankment that has been so execrated by artists, arguing that it afforded uninterrupted communication with the Mount, and, moreover, had reclaimed land for pasturage and later for cultivation. Suddenly they stopped. The sea was overflowing the road, just a sheet of moisture across the stony pathway; but it indicated to those who knew that farther on there would be treacherous spots and impassable places. They must stop and wait.

"It won't be long now; it's going down fast," observed M. Valsaci, pointing with his finger to the road from which the thin coating of liquid was disappearing as if drunk in by the earth or pulled down by some mysterious force. They alighted so as to watch the strange, rapid, silent departure of the sea; step by step they followed it on. Already patches of green appeared in the receding water. These patches became larger, grew round and finally appeared like islands. Later they seemed like continents separated from each other by miniature oceans, and by and by the whole gulf was in view, abandoned by the tide. Its recession seemed like the drawing back of a gigantic silver veil, a veil full of large rents, the rents growing larger and laying bare great meadows, not yet, however, uncovering the yellow sands. They climbed back into the drag again, and everybody stood so as to see better. The road was drying, and the horses went on, but still quite slowly, and the jolting causing them to lose their equilib-

rium, Mariolle suddenly felt the shoulder of Mme. de Burne leaning against his. At first he thought that this proceeded from accident, but she stayed in the same position, and every turn of the wheels jolted her against him, causing his heart to bound and his frame to tremble. He no longer dared to look at the young woman, paralyzed by this unhoped-for familiarity, and thought deliriously: "Is it possible? Am I dreaming, or are we both losing our heads?"

The horses began to trot, and they all had to sit down. Mariolle felt a sudden, mysterious impulse to be polite to M. de Pradon, and he began to tender him flattering attentions. Almost as susceptible as his daughter to compliments, the old gentleman quickly responded to this behavior and was soon smiling radiantly.

Now the drag had reached the embankment and was directing itself toward the Mount at the end of this road, built high above the sands. The River of Pontorson flowed at its left; to the right the meadows covered with fine turf, called "la Criste marine," were now succeeded by the dunes, still moist and soaking from the sea.

And still the great Abbey seemed to loom higher and higher toward the blue sky, against which it was now clearly projected in all its details, its crest ornamented with steeples and tiny towers, and the grimacing gargoyles, the monstrous headgear with which the terrified superstition of our ancestors was wont to crown its Gothic sanctuaries. It was almost one o'clock when they reached the hotel where luncheon had been ordered. They were all very hungry and went gladly to the table; every one appeared in good humor, and two hearts were sensible of the approach of happiness. At dessert, when the good wine and the pleasant conversation had put everybody into a frame of mind to see every proposition through rose-colored glasses, Mariolle asked: "How would it do to stay over until to-morrow? Don't you think it would be pleasant to have dinner here and see all this by moonlight?"

Mme. de Burne agreed at once, and the two men also; but Mme. Valsaci demurred on account of her little boy left at home. Her husband, however, reassured her, saying that the child had often been left in this manner for one night, and at once wrote out a telegram to the nursery governess. He had taken a great fancy to Mariolle, who had approved of the embankment and had not said as so many did that it spoiled the view of the Mount.

On leaving the table they went to visit the Abbey, taking the road on the ramparts. The town, a mass of mediæval houses crowded one upon another on the block of granite that bears the Abbey on its summit, is separated from the sands by a high, battlemented wall. This wall winds upward with turns and angles, with platforms, watch-towers, one surprise after another for the eye, which at every convolution discovers a new widening of the immense horizon All were silent, out of breath with climbing so soon after a very good luncheon and peculiarly impressed at seeing the huge edifice that was their goal appear and disappear. There, above them, it seemed suspended in the sky, an enormous tangle of spires and belfries, of granite hewn into flowers, of flying buttresses, of arches reaching

from tower to tower, a marvellous masterpiece of massive yet delicate architectural lace, thrown out against the celestial azure from which it seemed to menace them with a fantastic army of gargoyles with the faces of animals. Between the sea and the Abbey, on the northern flank of the Mount, a steep slope called the "Forest," on account of being covered with old trees, makes a dark green spot against the illimitable plain of sand.

Michèle de Burne and André Mariolle, who were walking in front of the others, stopped still to look. She leaned on his arm, dizzy with an emotion she had never yet experienced. She was climbing, light and alert, ready to climb forever with him toward that wonderful edifice and toward something else also. She could have wished this steep road to be an endless one, for for the first time in her life she was tasting happiness. She murmured:

"Heavens, how beautiful!"

"I can see nothing—except you!" he replied, gazing at her.

With a smile she answered: "I am not usually poetical, but this is so wonderful that I feel myself completely carried away by it."

"I love you to madness," he whispered. He was conscious of her arm slightly pressing his, and they went on.

A guardian met them at the Abbey gate, and they entered by a superb staircase between two enormous towers that conducted them to the guard-room. From thence they went on from room to room, courtyard to courtyard, dungeon to dungeon, listening with wonder, enchanted by all they saw: the great crypt with its exquisite columns, which with all their wondrous beauty are so prodigiously strong that they support not only the entire choir of the cathedral, but all the Merveille, a formidable construction in three stories, three Gothic piles, rising one above the other, the most stupendous masterpiece of architecture produced by the military monasticism of the Middle Ages. Next came the cloister. Their surprise was so great at its surpassing beauty that they stood motionless before that great inner court containing the lightest, most graceful and most charming colonnade of any cloister on earth. In two rows the slender, delicate columns, crowned with delicious capitals, bear through the entire length of the four galleries an uninterrupted wreath of Gothic ornamentation, showing infinite variety and inexhaustible invention, the simple, graceful work of those artists of the Middle Ages who, abounding in imagination, wrought their dreams and visions into stone with hammer and chisel.

Mme. de Burne and Mariolle went round it slowly, arm in arm, while the rest, a little weary, admired the cloister from a distance, standing near the door.

"Oh, how heavenly all this is!" she cried, stopping all at once.

"I know nothing. I see nothing. I do not even know whether I exist. All I know is that you are near me," he answered. Then she looked him full in the face and, smiling, murmured:

"André!"

He knew then that she was his. They said nothing more, but went on, blind to all the wonders they passed by until reaching the lace staircase, which is so beautiful that it distracted them for a moment, imprisoned as it is in an arch thrown out between two belfries, to climb, it would seem, to the clouds;

and they were again seized with astonishment when they reached the Chemin des Fous, a dizzy path of granite, winding without any handrail, almost to the last turn.

"May one walk there?" asked Michèle.

"No, it is forbidden," answered the guide.

She showed him a twenty-franc piece. The man hesitated. All the family, already giddy, suspended as they were above the abyss below, opposed this imprudence.

"Would you dare to go?" she asked Mariolle. He smiled. "I have climbed worse places than that," he affirmed.

Paying no attention to the remonstrances of the others, they began to mount. He went ahead on the narrow ledge overhanging the abyss and she followed him, her eyes avoiding the yawning gulf beneath, faint with terror now, desperately gripping the hand he held out to her. She could feel that he was composed and steady, sure of his head and of his footing, and she thought, even in the midst of her terror: "Truly, this is a man!" There they were alone together, surrounded by illimitable space, as high up as the sea-birds go, commanding the same horizon as the white-winged gulls, who roam aloft, ceaselessly exploring with their yellow eyes. Feeling her tremble, Mariolle asked:

"You are dizzy?"

"A little—but with you I fear nothing," she murmured in answer. Then, drawing nearer, he placed his arm around her to support her, and she was so reassured by the help that she raised her head and gazed about her. He was almost carrying her. She enjoyed the strong protection that enabled her to look around so close to heaven, and she felt grateful to him with a feminine impulse that he did not, by trying to kiss her, sully this supreme part of the expedition.

When they rejoined the others, who, racked by anxiety, had been awaiting them, M. de Pradon said to his daughter:

"Good God! What an idiotic thing to do!"

"No," she said firmly. "It ended successfully. Nothing can be idiotic that ends successfully."

He shrugged his shoulders, and they went on their downward way. After buying photographs, they proceeded to the hotel, where it was almost dinner time. The hostess advised her guests to take a walk along the sands so as to see the Abbey from the side of the open sea, where, she said, it presents its most magnificent aspect. Although tired, the party set off and went round the ramparts, going out some distance on the dune, whose hard-looking surface was in places treacherously soft. From this side the Abbey changes its appearance from that of a marine cathedral to that of a feudal castle, as if to threaten the invading ocean with its crenelated wall pierced with loopholes and sustained by gigantic buttresses.

But Michèle de Burne and André Mariolle paid little attention to all this. They were thinking only of each other, enmeshed in the net which each had spread for the other, immured in that prison where one knows nothing of what goes on around. When they found themselves under the light of the lamps at the dinner table they appeared to awaken to earthly things, and they even

made the discovery that they were extremely hungry. The party remained long at the table, and when dinner was over they forgot all about the moonlight, engrossed in pleasant conversation. No one seemed to wish to go out and no one proposed it. In vain the full moon invested with poetic gleams the shallow flood of rising tide, imperceptibly slipping up over the sands; in vain she lit up the serpentine ramparts and illuminated the outlines of the Abbey with her softening, enchanting beams. No one seemed to care to see anything more.

It was not yet ten o'clock when Mme. Valsaci, overcome with sleep, proposed that all should retire. The idea met with unanimous approval, and after exchanging cordial good-nights, they separated.

André Mariolle knew well that he would not sleep. He lit the two candles on his mantel, opened his window and looked out into the night. All his being was unnerved by the torture of vain hopes. He knew that she was there, quite near, separated from him only by two doors, and it was almost as impossible to go to her as to turn back that tide that was slowly creeping up on the dunes outside. He felt a desire to cry aloud in a torture of inappeasable longing and expectation, asking himself what he should do, for he felt that he could not endure the solitude of this evening of fruitless happiness.

Gradually all sounds had died away in the hotel and in the one winding street of the town. Mariolle remained leaning out of the window, knowing only that time was passing, watching the silver surface of the high tide, and putting off the hour of retiring, as if he had a presentiment of some inexplicable good fortune. All at once it seemed as if a hand touched the handle of his door. He started and looked round. A woman with her head veiled in white lace, and wearing one of those robes-de-chambre that look as if made of snow and silk and lace, entered. She carefully closed the door behind her; then, as if she had not seen him standing, overwhelmed with joy, in the open frame of his window, she walked straight to the mantel and extinguished the two candles.

CHAPTER V

A STRATAGEM

They were to meet again to say good-by the next morning before the door of the hotel. André Mariolle, who was the first to come down, awaited her with a strange mixture of anxiety and happiness. What would she do? How would she act? What would become of her and of him? What sort of adventure was this in which he had embarked—disastrous or happy? She could make of him whatever she wished—a dreamer, similar to an opium fiend, or a martyr, just as she thought fit. He walked up and down beside the two

carriages—for they were now to separate: he to go back by St. Malo, so as to carry out the story she had invented, they to return to Avranches.

When would he see her again? Would she curtail her visit to the Valsacis or would she prolong it? He had a terrible dread of her first look and of her first words, for he had not seen her at all and they had scarcely spoken during their brief embrace of the preceding night. She had murmured over her shoulder at the door as she went out with her rapid, noiseless tread: "À demain, mon ami!"

He heard her voice and trembled. She was speaking in a loud tone, apparently irritated by some remark of her father's, and when André saw her on the lowest step of the staircase she wore the little tell-tale pout of impatience on her lips.

Mariolle stepped forward. She saw him and began to smile. In her eyes, now calm and peaceful, a light of sweetness appeared that communicated itself to the rest of her face. Then, in the hand suddenly and tenderly offered, he saw the confirmation, without restraint and without repentance, of her self-bestowal.

"Then we must part!" said she.

"Alas! madame, I feel it more than I dare to express."

"It will not be for long," she murmured. Then, as M. de Pradon approached to join them, she whispered:

"Say that you are going to make a ten days' tour in Brittany—but don't make it."

Mme. Valsaci, much excited, appeared:

"What is this that your father tells me? That you are to leave the day after to-morrow? Why, I thought you were to stay until a week from Monday!"

Mme. de Burne said gloomily:

"Papa always puts his foot in it. He knows I am almost certain to get neuralgia if I stay for any length of time at the seaside, and I am merely trying to avoid an attack. But this is scarcely the time to discuss the matter."

Mariolle's driver now came to ask him to get in at once, as he was afraid they might otherwise miss the train for Pontorson.

"When do you go back to Paris?" asked Mme. de Burne.

He hesitated a moment.

"Well, I can hardly tell," he answered. "I wish to visit St. Malo, Brest, Douarnenez, the Bay of Trépassés, Pointe du Raz, Audierne, Penmarch, Le Morbihan; in fact, all the places of interest in the Breton peninsula. This will take——"

After a silence, during which he was supposed to be making a careful calculation:

"Fifteen or twenty days," he concluded, with exaggeration.

"That's a long time," she replied, laughing. "As far as I am concerned, if I have another nervous attack such as I had last night, I shall be obliged to return in two days."

Almost suffocated with emotion, he longed to cry out: "Thank you!" But he contented himself with kissing the hand which she extended for a farewell salutation, and after a thousand thanks, compliments and assurances of sympathy, exchanged by him with the Valsacis and M. de Pradon, the latter reassured to some extent by hearing the announcement of the Brittany trip, he climbed into his carriage and de-

parted, his head turned toward her to the last. He returned at once to Paris, seeing nothing all through his return journey; all night long, sitting back in a corner of the carriage, his eyes half shut, his arms crossed, his soul plunged in revery, he did nothing but live over and over again the realization of his dream.

As soon as he reached home, from the moment of his return, in the silence of his library where he worked and wrote in the company of his books, his piano and his violin, there began for him that torture of impatience, like a harassing fever that is the curse of insatiable hearts. Surprised at finding himself capable of feeling interest in any pursuit, unable not only to concentrate his mind, but to keep from gnawing restlessness by busying himself in his usual manner with music and reading, he wondered what he could do to combat this new trouble. A desire to go out, to walk about, seemed to possess him constantly: a crisis of the body brought about by the state of the mind —simply an instinctive and inappeasable longing to go in search of some one.

He put on his coat and hat and opened the door. In descending the steps he asked himself, "Where shall I go?" Then an idea that had not yet occurred to him suggested itself: they would require a place of rendezvous—some pretty and secluded place. He went up and down the avenues, then the streets and boulevards, anxiously interviewing concierges with benevolent smiles and landladies with doubtful expressions, seeing apartments with unsatisfactory hangings and carpets, and returned at night, discouraged. At nine the next morning he recommenced his quest and ended by discovering at nightfall, in a quiet street in Auteuil, at the end of a garden with three exits, a quiet cottage that an upholsterer in the neighborhood promised to furnish in two days. Mariolle described what he wanted—very simple furniture in varnished pine and thick, good carpets. The garden was in the charge of a baker who lived close to one of the gates. An arrangement was made with the baker's wife to take care of the rooms, and orders given to a florist to keep them supplied with flowers and plants. All this took him till nearly eight o'clock, and when he got home, tired out, he found with a pulsing heart a despatch on his bureau awaiting him. Opening it he read:

Shall be back to-morrow evening. Am sending letter with instructions.

MICHE.

He had not yet written to her, fearing that his letter might go astray, as he did not know exactly when she would leave Avranches. As soon as he had dined he sat down at his writing-table to pour out what was seething in his soul. This was a long and difficult task, for every expression, every idea that suggested itself appeared clumsy, feeble, mediocre, totally inadequate to convey the passionate gratitude that inspired him.

The letter which he got from her early next morning confirmed her intention of returning that evening and begged him not to allow himself to be seen by any one for some days, in order to be able to give out the story of the Brittany trip. In it she also asked him to promenade next morning toward ten on the terrace bordering on the

Seine in the Garden of the Tuileries. He got there an hour too soon and wandered about in the great garden, only peopled at that hour by early risers going to work, bureaucrats hurrying to the ministries on the left bank of the Seine, clerks, shop girls, workers of all descriptions. He experienced a reflective pleasure in contemplating these hurried people whom the need of daily bread condemned to brutalizing forms of work, and comparing them to himself at this hour on the point of meeting his sweetheart, one of the queens of society, he felt himself to be a fortunate and privileged being and thanked the blue sky above, for Providence was to him but the alternations of blue sky and rain, due to chance—the crafty overseer of things and men.

"She's sure to be late," he thought. Scarcely, however, had the idea occurred to him when the clock in a near-by tower sounded out the ten strokes, and he imagined he saw her cross the garden, hurrying along like a working girl hastening to get to her shop. He hesitated. "Can it be she?" He recognized her gait, but was surprised at her changed appearance, so simple and plain in her modest dark suit. She walked straight to the stairs mounting to the terrace, as if she were accustomed to going there.

"She must like this place," he thought, "and come here at times to walk." He watched her raise her skirt to place her foot on the first step, then trip lightly up the rest. He went forward to meet her. She said, as soon as they were close enough together to speak:

"How imprudent you are!" anxiously. "You must not let yourself be seen like that. I could see you when I was over in the Rue de Rivoli! Come and let us sit down—back there, behind the orangery. Now, this is where you must wait for me next time."

"Then you often come here?" he could not help asking.

"Yes, indeed. I like the place; and, as I am fond of early walks, I come here to take exercise and to admire the landscape, which is very pretty. Besides, here one never meets anybody, while the Bois is impossible. But do not reveal the secret."

"Never fear!" he laughed.

Taking hold of her hand, a tiny hand hidden in the fold of her coat, he sighed: "Oh! how I love you! How long it seemed since I had left you! Did you get my letter?"

"Yes, thank you. I was glad to get it."

"Then you are not angry with me?"

"No. Why should I be? You are too nice for me to be angry with you."

He tried to find words vibrant with gratitude and love, ardent words; but none that he found suitable would come. So he repeated, too overcome to wait:

"How I love you!"

"The reason why I made you come here," she said, "was because of the water and the boats; but even then it does not look like Avranches. Still, it is not bad."

They were sitting on a bench near the stone balustrade that runs along the river, almost alone, invisible from all parts, three nurserymaids and two gardeners their only companions at this time on the terrace. Carriages rolled along the quay at their feet, footsteps sounded on the sidewalk against the wall that supported the promenade. Hardly as yet knowing what to say to each other, they surveyed that beauti-

ful part of Paris that stretches from l'Ile St. Louis and the towers of Notre Dame to the slopes of Meudon. She repeated:

"It's very pretty, all the same."

Then, all at once struck by the recollection of their trip to the sky at Mont St. Michel, he cried:

"Do you remember our climb up the Chemin des Fous?"

"Yes, indeed! Do you know I feel a little frightened when I think of it now! I don't believe I could do it again. I was intoxicated with the air, the sun and the sea. But—look around; there is beauty to be seen here, too. I am very fond of Paris."

He was surprised and felt a confused presentiment that something existing in her at Mont St. Michel was missing now. He murmured:

"What does the place matter, so long as you are with me!"

Without answering, she pressed his hand. More overjoyed at this silent caress than he would have been, perhaps, by a tender word, he now felt his heart relieved of the embarrassment that had tied his tongue, and he spoke. He told her slowly and with solemnity that his life was at her disposal for her to do with it as she thought fit.

Pleased, but at the same time a true daughter of the times, ever a prey to scepticism and to a tendency to irony, she smiled and answered:

"Oh, pray do not give yourself away so completely as all that!"

He turned fully toward her, and, looking her straight in the eyes, repeated, with that earnest look that is almost like a touch, what he had just said, only at greater length, more ardently, more poetically. All that he had written in previous letters he now repeated to her with such fervor and conviction that she sat by, listening as if in a cloud of incense. She felt herself caressed in every womanly fibre by those adoring words as she had never been before in all her life of adulation. When he ended she answered simply:

"And I—I love you well also."

They were holding each other's hands just like the boys and girls one sees wandering in country lanes and were watching with dreamy eyes the steamboats gliding along the river. There they sat, alone in Paris, in the confused hum of movement that floated around them, more alone in the very centre of that city pulsing with life and action than they had been during the moments they spent together in the territory of the sea-gulls at the top of the Chemin des Fous; and for several seconds they completely forgot that any other beings besides themselves existed on the earth. It was she who first returned to a sense of external things and realized that time was passing.

"Shall we meet again here to-morrow?" she asked.

He pondered for some minutes, embarrassed as to how to express what he wished to say:

"Yes—yes—certainly. But—can we not see each other somewhere else? Of course this spot is secluded—but still every one else has a right to come to it."

"That's true," she answered hesitatingly. "However, it is imperative also that you should not be seen by any of our friends for at least a fortnight, so that your story of the expedition may be believed. How mysterious and romantic it will be! We shall meet, and no one in Paris besides our two selves

will know that you are in the city! But it is, of course, impossible that you should come to my house, so I don't quite see——"

He flushed and interrupted:

"I can't either ask you to come to my house. But are there not other means—other places?"

She exhibited neither surprise nor anger, being a practical-minded woman, devoid of false modesty.

"Why, yes," she replied. "But, of course, it takes time, and we must think——"

"I have thought——"

"Already?"

"Yes, already. Do you know the Rue des Vieux Champs at Auteuil?"

"No."

"It is between the Rue Tournemine and the Rue Jean de Saulge. In that little street there is a garden, in that garden a cottage having exits by each of the streets that I have mentioned."

"What then?"

"That cottage awaits your presence."

She thought intently for a moment, then, quite without embarrassment, she asked two or three questions dictated by feminine prudence. He answered them to her satisfaction evidently, for, as she rose to go, she murmured:

"Very well—I'll come to-morrow."

"At what time?"

"Three o'clock."

"I shall be there waiting for you at No. 7. Do not forget." They were now standing. "Do not accompany me," she said. "Stay here for about ten minutes, and then go away by the quay. Adieu!"

She left quickly, with the discreet, modest, hurried demeanor of one of those good, industrious girls that one sees hastening through the streets to their daily scene of honorable toil. Mariolle took a fiacre and drove to Auteuil, fearing lest the cottage should not be ready in time. He found it full of workmen, the sound of the tapping of hammers resounding throughout it. The walls were hung with tapestries, and the floors covered with carpets; everything had been cleaned and put in order. The garden, which was the remnant of an ancient park, containing some fine old trees and one or two summer-houses, was being beautified by a florist. He had already planted rose-bushes, pinks, geraniums, mignonette and hosts of other flowers, whose development can be hastened or retarded so as to transform in a day an uncultivated field into a gorgeous flower bed.

Mariolle was as delighted as if he had just scored some signal triumph; and, having made the upholsterer swear solemnly that all the furniture would be in its place in the rooms before noon the next day, he went off to buy divers bibelots in order that the interior should be as gorgeous as the garden. He chose photographs of celebrated pictures to hang on the walls, and for the mantels and tables Deck porcelain and other knickknacks dear to women. In the course of that afternoon he squandered two months' income and squandered it with delight, remembering that for ten years he had practiced continued economy, not because he wished to save, but simply because he did not feel impelled to spend; in consequence he was able now to be prodigal.

Next morning he returned to the cottage, superintended the placing of the furniture on its arrival, hung the pictures himself, mounted a stepladder, sprayed all the hangings with perfumes,

burned perfumes in the rooms and sprinkled them over the carpets. In his fever of love, his rapture, he wanted to make this the most delicious, the most perfect affair he had ever attempted. Every little while he glanced at the clock, calculating how many hours, how many minutes were to elapse before her arrival, and he hurried the workmen and worried himself over the placing of the different pieces of furniture and ornaments.

Moved by prudence, he dismissed all the workmen before two o'clock, and then, during the slow last revolution of the minute hand around the dial of the clock in the silence of the house where he was awaiting the greatest happiness that the world held for him, he tasted, alone with his dream, going up and down through the rooms, speaking aloud, imagining, giving rein to his passion-kindled fancy, the most frenzied enjoyment of love he was ever to know.

Then he went out into the garden. The rays of the sun fell on the grass through the trees, lighting up most exquisitely a basket of roses in particular. Heaven itself was smiling on the rendezvous. He went now and stood close to the front door, opening it frequently, fearing that she might mistake the number.

Three o'clock rang out and was immediately echoed by the clocks of ten convents and manufactories in the vicinity. He stood now, watch in hand, and was astonished when two light taps sounded on the wood of the door just outside his ear, for he had heard no noise of footsteps along the street.

He opened the door; it was she. She looked surprised at his prompt appearance, then glanced around apprehensively at the neighboring houses and felt reassured, for she certainly knew no one among the modest bourgeois who would inhabit dwellings of this character; then she examined the garden with curiosity that changed into approval. Finally she placed the backs of her two hands just ungloved on the mouth of her friend, then took his arm and entered the garden. She repeated at every step:

"Dieu! how lovely! How perfectly unexpected and lovely!" Noticing the basket of roses bathed in sunlight, she cried: "This seems like fairyland!"

She plucked a rose, kissed it, and put it in her corsage. They went into the cottage, and she seemed so pleased that he felt moved to kneel at her feet, although at the bottom of his heart there was, perhaps, a feeling that she might have shown a little less interest in the place and more in him. She looked all about her, excited and pleased like a little girl who finds and handles a new toy; feeling no atom of shame or regret in this, the grave of her womanly honor, she appreciated its costly elegance with the satisfaction of a connoisseur who sees evidence that his taste has been complimented. On her way hither she had been haunted by a fear of encountering a commonplace house with stuffy, faded hangings, soiled by previous rendezvous. But everything here was new, unexpected, dainty and had been arranged expressly for her; it must have cost Mariolle a pretty penny. He was certainly perfect, this man. Turning toward him, she raised her two arms with a ravishing gesture of appeal, and they clasped each other in one of those embraces that give the strange double sensation of bliss

and unconsciousness.

Before parting they went round the garden and sat down in one of the summer-houses where they were invisible to outsiders. André, full of exuberance, spoke to her as if she were an idol who for his sake had just stepped down from a pedestal, and she listened languorously as he had seen her do at the end of long visits from people who had bored her. But she remained affectionate all the same, her face irradiated by a smile that was tender, though a little constrained, and, holding his hand, she pressed it with a continuous pressure more unreflecting, perhaps, than eloquent.

She could not have been listening to what he was saying, for she broke in, in the midst of a sentence, to say:

"I must certainly go. I am due at the Marquise of Bratiane's at six. I shall be very late."

He went with her to the door which he had opened for her at her entrance. They embraced; then, with a furtive glance up and down the street, she hastened off.

Twenty days passed: days so sweet, so full of the light of happiness! It seemed to him that they could never end, that they would go on forever like this, lost to all else, he living for her alone; in his mind, the unbalanced mind of an artist who has produced nothing, always tormented by expectation, arose an impossible dream of a discreet, quiet life of clandestine happiness. She came every three days, without resistance, attracted, it would seem, as much by the amusement she found in the assignation, by the charm of the little cottage now a hotbed of rare flowers and by the novelty of this life of love, scarcely a dangerous one, since no one had any right to molest her in it, but full of mystery, nevertheless, as by the intense and ever-increasing infatuation of her lover. Then one day she said:

"Now, my dear, you must reappear in the world. You must come and spend the afternoon with me at my house to-morrow."

"Why must I reappear so soon?" he cried in dismay.

"Because if it were to leak out that you are back, the situation would give rise to suspicion."

He saw that she was right and promised to go to her house the next day. Then he asked:

"You are receiving to-morrow?"

"Yes," she replied. "A solemn little rite is to take place at my house to-morrow."

This news was unwelcome to André.

"What sort of rite?" he asked.

Mme. de Burne laughed delightedly: "I have persuaded Massival, by dint of outrageous flattery, to produce 'Didon' at my house—'Didon,' his new work which has not yet appeared. It is a poem of antique love. Mme. de Bratiane, who considered herself the sole proprietor of Massival, is exasperated. She also will be at my house, because she sings."

"Are many coming?"

"No, only a few intimate friends; you know them almost all."

"Can't I get out of going to this? I am so happy in my solitude."

"Oh, no, my friend! You know I care more for you than for all the rest put together."

His heart began to beat furiously. "Thank you," said he. "I shall be there."

CHAPTER VI

THE MUSICALE

"Bonjour, cher monsieur."

Mariolle could not help remarking that it was no longer "cher ami" as at Auteuil, and the handclasp was brief, the greeting of a woman whose mind was preoccupied, taken up entirely with society interests. He went on into the salon, while Mme. de Burne advanced toward the beautiful Mme. de Prieur, whose extreme decolletage and sculpturesque pretensions had earned for her the somewhat ironical nickname of "The Goddess." She was married to a member of the Institute, of the Department of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres.

"Ah! Mariolle," cried Lamarthe. "Where did you spring from? We all thought you were dead!"

"I'm just back from a trip to Finisterre." He went on to describe his imaginary tour, but the novelist interrupted him:

"Do you know the Baronne de Frémines?"

"No; only by sight, but I have heard a great deal about her. She's very peculiar, is she not?"

"The queen of madcaps, but with a bouquet of modernity that is simply delicious. Come and let me present you."

Taking him by the arm, she led him toward a young woman whom every one likened to a doll—a pale and exquisite little fair doll, invented and created by the devil himself expressly to bring about the damnation of big, bearded children. She had long, narrow eyes, cut a little obliquely, à la Chinoise; flashes of blue enamel were visible through the eyelids—eyelids that very rarely opened wide, and, when they did, dropped again almost instantly, to veil the mystery that seemed to enshroud her. Her fair, silky hair shone with silvery reflections, and her delicate, thin-lipped mouth seemed designed by a miniaturist and chiselled by a sculptor. The voice that issued from it had crystalline vibrations; and the ideas, unexpected, sarcastic, original, mischievous, the cold destructive seduction, the complex tranquillity of this neurotic little being inspired those under her influence with stormy and violent passions. She was known to all Paris as the most extravagant mondaine of society, also the wittiest, but no one really knew what she was, what she thought, what she did. Men in general were irresistibly captivated by her. Her husband was as insoluble an enigma as herself. Affable and lavish, he appeared to see nothing of what went on around him. Was he blind, or was he indifferent or simply good-natured? Perhaps, indeed, there was nothing to see except eccentricities which no doubt he also found amusing as well as the rest. But there were sinister rumors afloat in regard to him; some went so far as to say that he profited by his wife's dishonor.

Between Mme. de Burne and her existed mutual attraction and fierce jealousy, periods of intimacy, followed by crises of hostility.

They would be friendly, then quarrel,

then seek each other again like professional duellists who appreciate each other's skill and wish for a combat to the death. Just about this time the baronne was triumphing; she had scored a victory, a signal victory. Lamarthe had succumbed to her charms; she had snatched him from her rival and enlisted him among the titled captives of her bow and spear. The novelist was épris—puzzled, charmed and stupefied by all that he had discovered in this sphinx, and he could do nothing but descant upon her charms to every one —a state of mind that had already given rise to no little gossip.

At the moment that he was introducing Mariolle to Mme. de Frémines Mme. de Burne shot a glance from the other end of the salon. Smiling, he murmured to his friend:

"Look at the sovereign of these parts. She seems displeased."

André looked, but Mme. de Burne had turned to greet Massival just appearing on the threshold. He was immediately followed by the Marquise de Bratiane, which caused Lamarthe to observe:

"Aha! we're going to have a second rendering of 'Didon.' The first has just been enacted in the coupé of the marquise."

Mme. de Frémines added:

"The collection of our friend De Burne is certainly losing its choicest jewels."

A rage against, a sort of hatred toward this woman took possession of Mariolle; also an irritation against society in general, against the life led by these people, their ideas, their tastes, their futile aims, their puerile amusements. And so, profiting by the fact that Lamarthe had bent over to whisper to the baronne, he turned on his heel and went away.

The handsome Mme. de Prieur was standing alone a few paces away from him. He went to speak to her. According to Lamarthe, this woman represented the old type of femininity in this up-to-date clique. Young, tall, pretty, with very regular features and chestnut hair exhibiting gleams of red, her tranquil and benign charm, her calm and skillful coquetry, her great desire to please disguised under an appearance of simple and sincere affection, had won her strong partisans, whom she was very careful to guard from the power of dangerous rivals. Her house was said to be the resort of a few intimates, who unanimously sang the praises of her husband. She and Mariolle began to chat. She had a sincere admiration for this quiet, intelligent man who was so little spoken of and who was perhaps equal in intellect to the others.

Now the last guests began to come in. The portly Fresnel, out of breath, wiping with a last flourish of his handkerchief his perpetually moist and shiny forehead; Georges de Maltry, the modern philosopher; then, together, the Baron de Gravil and the Comte de Marantin. M. de Pradon was assisting his daughter to receive. He was particularly polite to Mariolle, but the latter with a heavy heart watched Mme. de Burne come and go, here and there, lavishing her attentions on everybody but himself, it seemed. Twice, it is true, she had flashed him from a distance a rapid glance that seemed to say: "I am thinking of you," but the impression was so fleeting that he was

not perfectly sure that he was not mistaken. Then, besides, he could not help seeing that the ostentatious court that Lamarthe was paying to Mme. de Frémines irritated Mme. de Burne.

"It is only pique," he said to himself, "the annoyance of a collector from whom a rare bibelot has been stolen." But he suffered, notwithstanding, and all the more because he saw that she watched them incessantly in a furtive manner and that the sight of Mme. de Prieur and himself seated chatting together did not appear to cause her the slightest uneasiness. This was because she was sure of him, while Lamarthe was escaping from her toils. Therefore, what was this love of theirs to her—this love born yesterday, which had obliterated all other impressions from his mind?

M. de Pradon now asked for silence, and Massival opened the piano which Mme. de Bratiane was approaching, taking off her gloves, for she was to voice the transports of "Didon," when the door opened again and a young man appeared who attracted all eyes. He was tall and slight, with short, curly, fair hair and a most aristocratic appearance. Even Mme. de Prieur seemed impressed.

"Who is this?" asked Mariolle of her.

"Why, don't you know him? Count Rodolph de Bernhaus."

"Ah! the one who fought Sigismund Fabre?"

"Yes."

This event had caused a great stir. The Comte de Bernhaus, of the Austrian Embassy, a diplomat with an illustrious future awaiting him, an elegant Bismarck it was said, having heard at an official reception a scurrilous allusion to his sovereign, challenged the one who had made it, a celebrated fencer, and killed him in the duel. After this combat, the renown of the comte equalled that of Sarah Bernhardt, with this difference that the name of the young diplomat was surrounded by a halo of poetic chivalry. In addition to this he was charming socially, an agreeable conversationalist and thoroughly distingué.

He sat down by Mme. de Burne with a most gallant air, and Massival took his place at the keyboard, up and down which his fingers roamed for some instants. Almost all the guests changed their seats, drawing close together so as to hear well and also command a good view of the singer. Lamarthe and Mariolle found themselves again shoulder to shoulder.

There was a profound silence, full of expectation, attention and respect; then the musicians began by a slow, a very slow succession of notes which seemed like a musical recital. There were pauses, light repetitions, a series of little phrases, at times languorous, at times nervous, even uneasy, but full of originality, it seemed to Mariolle. He could see a woman, the Queen of Carthage, in all the plenitude of her youth and beauty, walking slowly on the seashore. He understood that she suffered, there was upon her soul the burden of a great misfortune, and he looked attentively at Mme. de Bratiane. Motionless and pale, with her inky hair that looked as if it had been steeped in the Italian night, with her eyes looking straight in front of her, she stood waiting. There was in her strong, somewhat hard face, marked with eyes and eyebrows so dark that they looked like

black stains, in all her swarthy, powerful and passionate countenance something that thrilled the audience, a menace of a coming tempest, such as one descries in lowering skies. Swinging his head with its long hair, Massival continued the story of poignant sorrow that he was relating on the ivory keys.

Suddenly a tremor seemed to convulse the frame of the singer. She opened her mouth and uttered a long and piercing wail of anguish. Not one of those shrieks of tragic despair that singers emit on the theatrical stage with dramatic gestures, neither was it one of those screams of love betrayed that bring down the house with applause, but an indescribable cry, a cry of the flesh and not of the soul, like the howl of a mangled brute, the cry of animal femininity deceived and forsaken. Then she grew silent and Massival again took up more vibrantly, more feelingly the history of that wretched queen abandoned by the man she loved.

Once more the voice of the woman arose. She spoke now—spoke of the intolerable torture of loneliness, of her unappeasable craving for vanished caresses and the agony of knowing that he is gone forever. Her liquid and thrilling voice made every heart in that audience quiver. She seemed to suffer all that she described: to love, or, at least, to be capable of loving with a furious ardor, that swarthy Italian with her ebon hair. When she finished, her eyes were swimming in tears, and she wiped them away slowly. Lamarthe, bending toward Mariolle, quivering with the excited sensibility of an artist, said:

"Dieu! How grand she is at this moment, mon cher: that is a woman—and the only one here!"

Then, after a short pause, he added:

"But who knows? It may all be just a mirage due to music. After all, nothing exists except illusion. But what an art—to be able to evoke illusion, that or any other form of illusion!"

Then there came an intermission between the first and second parts, and the composer and his interpreter were warmly congratulated. Lamarthe especially was very lavish with his compliments, and he was thoroughly sincere, as a man particularly able to feel and comprehend and one keenly susceptible to beauty expressed in each and every form. The manner in which he described to Mme. de Bratiane what he had felt in listening to her was so flattering that she flushed with pleasure, and the other women who were looking on conceived some spite thereat. Very likely he was not unaware of the envy he was awakening in their breasts.

When he returned to his place he perceived the Comte Rodolphe de Bernhaus sitting beside Mme. de Frémines. She looked as if she had begun at once confiding some secret to him, and they were smiling at each other as if enchanted with their conversation. Mariolle, more and more gloomy, was standing near a door; the novelist joined him. The portly Fresnel, Georges de Maltry, the Baron de Gravil and the Comte de Marantin were all standing around Mme. de Burne, who was dispensing tea. She seemed encircled by a crown of worshippers. Lamarthe remarked this sarcastically to his friend, adding:

"But a crown that has lost a jewel, and I would wager that she would gladly give all the diamonds of the

Rhine to recover the missing gem!"

"Whom do you mean?" asked Mariolle.

"Why, Bernhaus, the handsome, the irresistible, the incomprehensible, he for whom this fête was given, for whose sake was worked this miracle of getting Massival to induce his Florentine Dido to sing here."

André, although incredulous, felt a pang shoot through his heart.

"Has she known him long?" he asked.

"Oh, no! ten days at the most. But she has made herculean efforts during those days and shown herself a masterly tactician. If you had been here you would have laughed."

"Indeed! Why?"

"She met him for the first time at Mme. de Frémines'. I was dining there that night. Bernhaus is very intimate there, as you may see—just look at him! Our beautiful friend, De Burne, at once started to work to conquer the redoubtable Austrian. She succeeded and she will continue to succeed, although the little Frémines is infinitely superior to her in impudence, in genuine indifference, and, perhaps, in perversity. Our friend, De Burne, is more skillful in coquetry, more womanly—I mean by that more modern-womanly; that is to say, irresistible through that artificial power of fascination which is to-day more effective than natural power to charm. It is not, accurately speaking, artificial, either; but æsthetic, the profound feeling for the æsthetic inherent in women. It is in this that her power consists. She knows her own powers thoroughly, because she pleases herself more than any one else, and she is never mistaken in the proper way in which to conquer a man."

"I think you are exaggerating," protested Mariolle. "To me she has always seemed very simple and natural."

"That is because simplicity and naturalness are the best bait to use to attract you. However, I don't wish to speak against her; I find her superior to almost all her associates. But, all the same, they are not women."

Some chords now struck by Massival called for silence; and Mme. de Bratiane sang the second part of "Didon." She was a superb Dido in her interpretation of physical passion and sensual despair. But Lamarthe never removed his eyes from the *tête-à-tête* of Mme. de Frémines and the Comte de Bernhaus. As soon as the last chords of the piano were lost in the applause of the audience, he continued in an annoyed tone as if he were arguing with an adversary:

"No, they are not women. Even the best among them are conscienceless jades. The more I see of them the less I experience that sensation of sweet intoxication which a true woman should awaken in a man. They do intoxicate us, it is true, but in exciting our nerves, for they are drugs! Oh, yes!—the taste is very nice—but the wine is not the real wine of other days. You see, my friend, women are created and put upon the earth for two things only—two things which alone can develop her true, her grand and excellent qualities—love and children. I am speaking like M. Prudhomme. Now, these women of to-day are incapable of loving, and they don't wish to have children. When they do unfortunately become mothers, they regard it as a misfortune, a burden. The fact is they are monsters!"

Astounded at the violent expressions of the author and the fire flashing from his eyes, Mariolle asked:

"Then why do you pass half your time tied to their apron strings?"

"Why? why?" answered Lamarthe impetuously. "Because they interest me. And, besides, would you forbid a doctor to walk the hospitals? These women are my clinic!"

This argument appeared to calm him. He went on:

"And then I like them because they so thoroughly reflect this era. At bottom I am scarcely more of a man than they are women. As soon as I begin to be attracted by one of them I cast about to discover what qualities she has that will repel me; in this way I am able to detach myself, just as a doctor takes poison so as to test an antidote. So I never get seriously entangled. I play the game just as well as any of them—perhaps better, and it helps me by supplying material for my books, while they derive no benefit whatever from it. How silly they are! What do they become in the end? Failures, nothing but failures, embittered by the lessening of their powers to attract as age creeps on."

Listening to him, Mariolle seemed to feel himself a prey to depression—a depression like that felt after a long succession of dark, rainy days. He knew perfectly well that the man of letters was not far wrong in his premises, but he could not admit that he was entirely correct. So, with some irritation, he argued with him not so much to defend women as to make contemporary literature responsible for their apparent decadence:

"In the era when novelists and poets set forth exalted and idealistic work," said he, "work calculated to stimulate the imagination, women sought and believed they found in life the reflection of that which they had found in fiction and poetry. To-day you persist in suppressing all poetical and romantic portrayal and create only works setting forth disillusionizing realism. Now, my dear fellow, love being dead in fiction is the cause of its death in our midst. You were the inventors of the ideals, and they believed in your inventions. At present you are the creators of realism, and, following in your wake, they have begun to believe in the vulgarity of everything."

Lamarthe, who greatly enjoyed literary discussion, was beginning a dissertation when Mme. de Burne came up. This was decidedly one of her best days. She was dressed to delight the eye, and wore the challenging and assertive air that the consciousness of a struggle always gave her. She seated herself.

"This is what I like—to surprise two men who are talking and not talking for me," she said. "What are you discussing?"

Without embarrassment and in a tone of gallant raillery Lamarthe revealed to her the question at issue. Then he resumed the argument with the added fervor due to her presence. She became interested at once in the subject and took up the cudgels for the modern woman with much wit and cleverness. She interpolated remarks, incomprehensible to the novelist, on the fidelity and attachment of which the most flirtatious could be capable, and Mariolle's heart beat high. When she had left them to go and sit by Mme. de

Frémines, who had persistently detained the comte, Lamarthe and Mariolle, charmed by her feminine cleverness and grace, declared to each other that she was incontestably an exquisite woman.

"Now, look at her!" exclaimed the novelist.

It was the great passage at arms. What were they talking of now, the comte and the two women? Mme. de Burne had arrived at the psychological moment, when the *tête-à-tête,* too prolonged even for people who were épris, was becoming wearisome; and she broke in with an indignant air, repeating what she had heard Lamarthe say. It was very applicable to Mme. de Frémines; moreover, it had just been uttered by her most recent victim: the Comte de Bernhaus was an exceptionally quick-witted man, who would immediately grasp the whole situation. At once the argument grew animated. Then the hostess called Lamarthe and Mariolle over to take part; and the discussion waxing warmer, she insisted on everybody joining in.

So a lively war of words ensued, every one contributing his or her convictions, and Mme. de Burne, allowing a perhaps slightly insincere touch of sentiment to soften her bright sayings, contrived to be the wittiest and most brilliant of all, for this was most indisputably a day of success for her, when she appeared cleverer, livelier and prettier than ever before.

CHAPTER VII

DOUBTS

As soon as André Mariolle had left Mme. de Burne, the incisive charm of her presence vanished. He felt within and around himself, in his flesh, his soul, in the air, in the entire world a sort of disappearance of that happiness in living that had recently animated and sustained him.

What had happened? Nothing—almost nothing. She had been charming to him at the end of that reception, telling him in one or two eloquent glances: "For me you are the only person here." And yet he felt that he had made discoveries in regard to her that he would have liked to ignore. They amounted to nothing, that is, almost nothing; and still he felt stunned, like a man who has surprised his mother or his father in a doubtful action, when he learned that during these twenty days, the twenty days which he had believed given up, devoted entirely by her as they had been by him, minute by minute, to the new and intense enjoyment of their love, she had resumed the tenor of her former existence: made many calls, plans, projects, recommenced those detestable struggles for supremacy with her rivals, pursued men, received adulation with delight and displayed all her allurements to others besides himself. Already; she had done all this already!

If it had been later, he would not have minded so much. He knew the world, the ways of women of society, their sentiments, their habits; he was too intelligent to have been exacting or unduly anxious. She was beautiful, made to please, to receive homage and listen to compliments. From among all her admirers she had chosen him, boldly, royally. He would have remained, he still remained all the same, the grateful slave of her caprices and the resigned spectator of her life as a brilliant woman. But he suffered within—in that dark cavern in the innermost recesses of the soul where our keenest susceptibles lie hidden. He was wrong doubtless; he always had been at fault in this manner ever since he could remember. He was too highly strung for comfort in his relations with other people; his soul was too thin-skinned. This was why he had always led so isolated a life; he dreaded contact and consequent jarring. In that it was he that was wrong, not others, for this dread of being jarred proceeds from a person's incapability of making allowances; from being unable to endure in others qualities not existing in oneself. However, he could not alter the pitch to which his sensibilities were keyed.

Certainly he had no reason to reproach Mme. de Burne. If she had insisted on his keeping away from her salon and remaining hidden during all those days, it was in order to prevent suspicion, to elude surveillance, to be more safely his in the future. Then why this pain gnawing at his heart? Ah, why, indeed? Because he had thought her entirely his, and now he had discovered that he never could seize and hold as his own the entire personality of this woman: that belonged to everybody.

He knew also, none better, that life is made up of approximations; up to now he had been resigned to this, hiding his discontent under a veil of distant reserve. But this time he had hoped that he would attain that which he had ceaselessly but vainly expected; that he would possess the woman he loved in her entirety: but to possess anything in its entirety is not given to any one on this earth. His evening was a melancholy one, but he tried to console himself by finding reasons to account for the painful impression he had carried away. When he was in bed this impression, instead of diminishing, deepened, and, as he never allowed any impulse of his soul to remain unanalyzed, he began to look for the source of this new uneasiness. It came, went away and came again, like little gusts of icy wind, awakening in his being a suffering, as yet indefinite and vague, but as dispiriting in its effect as those twinges of neuralgia brought on by a sudden draught of cold air—twinges that foretell a coming siege of agony.

Above all, he knew that he was jealous—jealous not only as a passionate lover, but as a man in possession of the object of his desire. As long as he had not seen her surrounded by other men, this sensation had remained dormant, although he had felt aware of its existence and had foreseen its awakening; but he had expected the awakening to be altogether different.

He doubted her instinctively, with an impulse of distrust that was tingling in his veins even more than influencing his thoughts; the almost physical discomfort of a man who is not sure of

the fidelity of his consort. Then the doubt began to crystallize into suspicion.

After all, what was he to her? Her first lover or her tenth? The direct successor to M. de Burne, the husband, or the successor to Lamarthe, Massival and Georges de Maltry and the predecessor, perhaps, of the Comte de Bernhaus? What did he know of her? That she was radiantly pretty, surpassingly chic, intelligent, bright and witty, but fickle, easily turned aside, wearied or disgusted; in love with herself far more than with anything or any body else, and an insatiable coquette. Had she had a lover or lovers before him? If she had not, would she have given herself up to him with such callousness or have entered his room so audaciously that night at the hotel? Or would she have agreed so readily to the rendezvous at Auteuil? Before consenting to go there she had simply asked a few questions, the questions that would occur to a prudent and experienced woman. He had answered circumspectly, like a man accustomed to such adventures, and she had said "yes," completely reassured, knowing it was all right from knowledge gained at earlier rendezvous.

He recalled how she had rapped with discreet authoritativeness at that little door behind which he stood with wildly beating heart; how she had entered without any perceptible emotion, only exhibiting anxiety as to whether she were likely to be recognized by those living in the neighboring houses; how she had seemed immediately at home in that house leased and furnished purposely for their meetings. No woman, it seemed to him, however bold, superior to moral conventions, disdainful of prejudice, could have been so thoroughly unmoved at a first rendezvous. Mental worry, physical hesitation, the instinctive dread of new paths, would she not have experienced all these had she not been a little practiced in this kind of adventure and if custom had not worn the bloom from her natural modesty?

With that irritating, intolerable fever that agitation of mind produces Mariolle tossed and turned in his bed, carried away by one dominating idea, like a man who imagines he is slipping down a precipice. He tried to arrest the course and break the thread of his thoughts; he tried to call up reassuring ideas and common sense arguments, but the germ of fear was there, and he could not prevent its leavening his imagination.

Still, what had he to reproach her with? Nothing more than being different from himself, not comprehending life as he did and not having the same degree of sensibility that characterized him.

As soon as he awoke next morning the desire to see her again, to fortify by her presence his confidence in her came upon him like hunger, and he awaited the suitable moment to make her his first official visit. When she saw him enter her little drawing-room, where, seated alone, she was writing letters, she came toward him with outstretched hands.

"Ah! good-day, cher ami!" she cried, with so bright and sincere an expression of joy that all the odious thoughts whose shadows still darkened his being took flight at the sight. He sat down near her and began to speak at once of the manner in which he loved her, for now they were not in the same

position in regard to each other as before. In tender words he made her understand that there exist on the face of the earth two kinds of lovers: those who desire like madmen and on the morrow of their triumph grow cool and those whose chains possession only rivets closer; in whom sensual love, intermingled with the immaterial, inexpressible appeal that the heart of such a man sends out to the woman he desires, brings about complete and torturing subjugation. Torturing? Yes, it is always torturing, no matter how happy the lover may be, for nothing, not even in the most intimate moments, ever completely slakes the thirst for Her that men carry in their hearts.

Mme. de Burne listened, charmed, grateful and delighted. She grew excited listening to him, just as one grows excited at a theatre watching an actor play his part with consummate skill, so that the rôle awakens an echo in one's own life. An echo was, in fact, awakened in her; and the echo was that of a sincere passion, but the passion did not exist in her heart. However, she felt glad to have evoked that sentiment, glad, too, that she had evoked it in a man capable of so exquisitely expressing it; a man who pleased her thoroughly and to whom she was truly attached, of whom she felt the need more and more, not physically, but to gratify her mysterious, feminine personality, eager for tenderness, homage and conquest—so glad that she wished to embrace him, to tender him her lips, everything, so that he might continue to adore her like that.

She answered him artlessly and without prudery, with the tactful skill peculiar to some women, indicating to him that he also had made great progress in her heart. And in the salon, where by chance that day no one came to disturb them till twilight, they remained *tête-à-tête* together, dwelling on the same topic, caressing each other with words which did not carry the same meaning to their two souls. Lamps had just been brought when Mme. de Bratiane appeared. Mariolle got up to leave. As Mme. de Burne accompanied him into the first salon, he asked her:

"When shall I meet you there?"

"Shall we say Friday?"

"Yes. What time?"

"The same—three o'clock."

"Till Friday, then, adieu. I adore you."

During the two days of expectation that separated him from this meeting, he discovered, he experienced the sensation of loneliness as he had never experienced it before. He needed the presence of a woman, and nothing but this imperative need existed on earth for him; and as this woman was quite near to him, and nothing but social conventions prevented him from going to her at any moment, he grew exasperated in his solitude at the slow passing of time, at the utter impossibility of performing an action thoroughly feasible.

He arrived at the rendezvous three hours too soon; but awaiting there where she would come pleased him and soothed his nerves, after having suffered so long in awaiting her mentally in places where she did not come.

Installing himself near the door long before the clock struck, he began to tremble with impatience as soon as the hour rang out. He waited on, and then the quarter-past sounded out. He looked up and down the little street cautiously,

but it was empty from end to end.

The minutes crawled by with torturing slowness. He drew out his watch continually, and when the hand arrived at the half-past, he felt in his soul the impression of having been standing in that spot an incalculable time. Then he heard a light foot on the pavement, and the little taps given by a gloved hand on the door made him forget his anguish and overflow with gratitude toward her.

A little out of breath, she asked:

"Am I very late?"

"No, not very."

"Just imagine, I had hard work to get away at all. My house was full of people, and I scarcely knew how to get rid of them. Tell me, are you here under your real name?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"So that I may be able to send you a despatch if I am prevented from coming."

"I am supposed to be M. Nicolle."

"All right. I shan't forget. Dieu! how lovely it is in this garden!"

The flowers, coaxed, renewed, multiplied by the gardener, who found that he had to do with a customer who paid liberally and never haggled, stretched all along the garden in five great, variegated, odorous stripes. Stopping in front of a bench near a basket of heliotrope:

"Let us sit here," she said. "I have a funny story to tell you."

Then she related him a piece of gossip so fresh that she was still quite excited over it. It seems that Mme. Massival, the former mistress of the artist, whom he had married, exasperated with jealousy, had got into Mme. de Bratiane's house in the midst of a soirée, when the singer was singing, accompanied by the composer. There she had made a frightful scene, to the fury of the Italian and the surprise and joy of the guests. Massival, almost crazy, tried to get her away, but his wife slapped his face, pulled out handfuls of his hair and beard, bit him and tore his clothes. He was helpless in her clutches, but Lamarthe and two servants came to his rescue and managed to get him away from the claws and teeth of the infuriated woman.

Calm was only restored, however, after the departure of the married pair. Ever since the musician had been invisible, while the novelist went about relating his experience in a most witty and amusing manner.

Mme. de Burne was quite upset about it, so much so that she could talk of nothing else. The names of Massival and Lamarthe returning constantly to her lips irritated Mariolle.

"You have just heard this?" he asked.

"Yes, of course—about an hour ago—scarcely an hour."

He thought bitterly: "And this is what made her late!"

Then he asked: "Shall we go in?"

Absent-minded and docile, she replied: "Oh, certainly."

When an hour later she had left him, for she said she was in a hurry, he went back alone into the little, solitary house and sat down in a low chair in their room. The impression of having no more possessed this woman than if she had not come at all seemed to create a black hole in his soul, his being, into whose depths he gazed. He saw nothing; he understood nothing; he seemed to comprehend nothing any more. If she had not eluded

his kisses, she had at any rate eluded the embrace of his tenderness by a mysterious unwillingness to belong to him. She had not refused to come; she had not stayed away. But it appeared to him that her heart had not come there with her: it had stayed away far off, roaming about, amused by trifles. He now perceived clearly that already he loved her with his senses as much as with his soul, perhaps more. The disappointment of his futile caresses inspired him with a frenzied desire to rush after her and fetch her back. But what would be the use, since her fickle mind was set on other matters that day? He would have to wait for the whim of love to come to his changeable mistress just as other caprices did. He went home slowly, very tired, with heavy steps, his eyes fixed on the pavement. And he remembered that they had made no rendezvous for the future—neither at her house nor anywhere else.

CHAPTER VIII

REVIVING HOPE

Until the beginning of the winter she remained faithful to their tryst—faithful but not prompt. During the first three months she often came late—generally from three-quarters of an hour to two hours after the time assigned. As the autumn rains often forced Mariolle to wait under his umbrella behind the garden door, shivering, his feet in the mud, he had a sort of little kiosk built of wood with a porch, behind this door, so as not to risk a wetting at each of these rendezvous. The trees were bare now, and the roses and other summer flowers were replaced by great masses of white, pink, violet, purple and yellow chrysanthemums, emitting a slightly acrid and balsamic odor that conveyed a sort of melancholy suggestion of autumn. In front of the cottage some rare flowers formed a great Maltese cross with their delicate shades. Mariolle never could pass this plot without a pain at the heart, at the thought that this cross seemed to indicate a tomb. Many a long hour he passed in the little kiosk behind the garden door. The rain would patter on the roof, then run along its edge and drip down; and at every vigil in the chapel consecrated to Expectation he would go over the same arguments, call up the same hopes, anxieties and discouraging thoughts. For it was one continued struggle, an unforeseen, incessant struggle, desperate, exhausting, a struggle with something which perhaps did not exist—the love of this woman.

How bizarre their meetings were! Sometimes she would arrive laughing, full of gossip, and would sit down without taking off her hat or veil or even kissing him. She did not often remember to kiss nowadays; her head was full of interesting preoccupations, far more delightful than the wish to offer her lips to those of a lover inspired by ardent passion. He would sit by her.

his heart overflowing with burning words which found no utterance; he would listen to and answer her, and, while seeming to be deeply engrossed in all she was telling him, would try at times to take her hand, which she would give him without observing that she did so, in a cool and friendly manner.

At other times she would seem tenderer and more loving; watching her intently, with the eyes of a lover who is conscious of possessing a portion only of his mistress' heart, Mariolle saw perfectly well that this comparatively affectionate demeanor proceeded from her having that day encountered no particular distraction or excitement to occupy her mind. Her continual delays also proved to Mariolle how little she cared for these meetings. One always hastens toward that which one desires; but every pretext is seized with readiness to postpone the hour for a disagreeable duty. A singular comparison occurred to him in connection with this. During the summer the desire for his cold plunge made him hurry his daily toilet, while in frosty weather he welcomed anything that happened to delay his arrival at the baths. That rendezvous at Auteuil, it seemed to him, must be for her what his winter douches were to him.

After a while she assigned the dates for their meetings at longer and longer intervals, and then would often postpone them to the next day, sending a dispatch at the last moment, pleading lame excuses that she thought would be acceptable, but which threw him into nervous, mental and physical excitement. If she had shown decided coldness, shown that she was bored by the passion which she saw and felt constantly increasing, he would probably have been at first angry, then offended, then discouraged, and finally appeased. On the contrary, however, she appeared fonder of him than ever, flattered by his love, more anxious to retain it, and she continued to show him a preference that began to arouse the jealousy of all her other admirers. She never could see him often enough at her house, and the same telegram that would postpone the rendezvous would always pressingly invite him to dinner or to spend the evening with her. At first he took these invitations as meant for a salve after the disappointment, but at last he came to understand that she very much liked to have him with her: that she needed his words of admiration, his glances of love, the discreetly caressing atmosphere of his presence. She needed him just as any idol needs worshippers in order to become a god: in the empty chapel it is only a piece of carved wood, but let even one devotee enter, prostrate himself and pray and the piece of wood is transformed into a god equal to Allah, or Brahma. Mme. de Burne felt herself born to fill the rôle of a fetish; fitted by nature to triumph over men by virtue of her beauty, grace, charm and coquetry, she was preeminently a sort of human goddess, delicate, disdainful, exacting and haughty, exalted and apotheosized by the incense of men.

She manifested her predilection and affection for Mariolle almost openly, careless of what people would say; perhaps with a secret desire to inflame and exasperate her other adorers. He was almost always to be found at her house, generally in the big fauteuil that Lamarthe called "the pulpit," and she ex-

perienced sincere pleasure in remaining entire evenings alone with him, chatting and listening to him talk. She enjoyed his intimacy in which he revealed his soul, this contact with a cultivated man of superior mind who belonged to her as absolutely as the little bibelots scattered about her salons. She also revealed to him much of her inner life, her thoughts, in these confidences that are as sweet to give as to receive; feeling herself more open with him, franker, more sincere, than with any other person, and loved him the more accordingly. With him, also, she experienced that impulse, inherent in many women, to impart some of their most intimate personality, to confide all that was possible of her inner self, a thing she had never before felt impelled to do. In her eyes this appeared a great deal for her to do, but to him it seemed little; he longed for, he hoped for, the great final abandonment of her soul to him, a gift she had never yet bestowed in answer to his caresses. As to caresses, she seemed to regard them as useless, tiresome even. She submitted to them not indifferently, but with quickly following weariness, the weariness succeeded by ennui. Even the slightest caresses seemed to fatigue and unnerve her. For instance, when in talking together, he would take one of her hands and hold it in his, and kiss the fingers one after the other as if they were bonbons, she would always seem anxious to get it away, and all up his arm he could feel the effort she made of withdrawal. When at the end of his visits, he would impress on her neck, between the collar of her dress and the little fluffy curls at the nape of her neck, a long kiss, which sought the aroma of her body through the folds of material covering it, she invariably made a slight retreating movement, and he could detect an almost imperceptible shrinking of her skin under his lips.

All these signs pierced him like stabs from a knife; and he would leave her presence with wounds that bled ceaselessly in his hours of solitude. How was it that she had not had at least that period of intoxication that in almost every woman follows voluntary abandonment of herself to a lover? This interval, often short and often followed by fatigue and disgust, is very rarely missing altogether. This mistress had made of him not a lover, but a sort of intelligent associate. Still, what had he to complain of? Those who give themselves in their entirety perhaps had not so much to give.

He did not pity himself, he only feared: he feared that other, the one who would come all at once, met today or to-morrow, artist, society man, officer, strolling player, it did not matter who, born to please this woman, who would please her because he was born for that purpose: the one who would arouse in her for the first time the imperious desire to love. Already he was jealous of the future, just as he had been jealous of the unknown past, and just as all the intimates were jealous of him. Some believed he was her lover; others, following Lamarthe's opinion, thought she was simply amusing herself, driving him insane, just to annoy and exasperate them—but nothing more serious. Her father was disturbed and made remarks to her that were received with hauteur, and the more people talked, the more she persisted in testifying openly her prefer-

ence for Mariolle by departing from the prudent circumspection that had always regulated her life.

He, however, growing uneasy over the murmurs of suspicion, spoke of them to her:

"What does it matter to me?" she asked.

"But, if you really loved me——"

"Do I not love you, mon ami?"

"Yes, and no. You love me very much at home, in your own house—and very little elsewhere. I should prefer the contrary for my own sake—and for yours, too."

She began to laugh, and answered:

"One can do but one's best!"

"Oh, if you knew!" he answered; "how hard I try to make you love me! But the more I try, the more it seems to me that I am trying to seize something intangible, to clasp a statue of ice that gradually melts away in my arms."

She scarcely answered, rather disliking the subject, and put on that distrait look that she wore so often at Auteuil. He did not dare to pursue the theme, but gazed at her as one sees amateurs at museums gaze at objects that they long to carry away with them.

His days, his nights, now contained for him only hours of suffering, for he lived with the fixed idea that she was his, yet not his, captive yet free, in his hold, yet out of his grasp. He lived about her and near to her, and did not reach her, and he loved her with all the unsatisfied hunger of his body and soul. Just as he had done at the foreshadowing of their liaison, he began to write letters to her. By means of pen and ink he had succeeded in overthrowing her virtue—perhaps by the same means he would be able to overcome this new and secret resistance.

Making fewer visits to her house, he repeated in almost daily letters the inanity of his effort to make her love him. Occasionally, when he had been specially eloquent, passionate, grief-stricken, she would vouchsafe an answer. Her letters dated for effect "Midnight," "One A.M.," "Two A.M.," etc., were bright, terse, well-expressed, encouraging, and yet disheartening to him. She reasoned clearly, wrote wittily, and even with imagination. But in vain he read and reread them; in vain he pronounced them just, intelligent, well-expressed, graceful and satisfying to his vanity as a man. They did not come from the heart; they did not really satisfy any more than did the kisses given in the cottage of Auteuil.

He could not at first understand how this was; but by dint of reading them over and over he came to see the reason. It is by studying their writings that one contrives most thoroughly to understand people. Words spoken dazzle and deceive because we watch the eyes and the lips of the utterer: the eyes and the lips please and allure, but the black words on the white paper betray the naked soul.

Men succeed by the cunning use of rhetoric, by professional dexterity, by practice in using the pen continually in the affairs of life, in being able to disguise their true natures in what they express on paper, either in impersonal, utilitarian or literary prose. But women rarely write except to speak of themselves, and they put a little of their personality into every word. They know no tricks of style, and they betray themselves by the naïveté of their expres-

sions. He called to mind the correspondence of celebrated women: how clearly the writers had revealed themselves, the pedants, the witty women, the sentimental ones.

What was most striking in Mme. de Burne's letters was the utter absence of sensibility. This woman could think; but she could not feel. He recalled letters he had had from other women, for he had had many. A little bourgeoise, met during his travels, and with whom he had contracted a liaison that lasted three months, used to write him delicious, vibrant letters, full of delightful and unexpected turns. He had often been astonished at the flexibility, the vivid elegance, the variety of her style. How did she come by it? Simply through her capacity for feeling—nothing more. A woman does not elaborate her periods; emotion, pure emotion, dictates her phrases: she uses no dictionary. When she feels strongly she writes expressively, without any trouble, or any studied elegance, aided by the sincerity of her nature.

The sincerity of Mme. de Burne's nature came to her assistance, and she wrote the letters of a clever and amiable woman. Mariolle tried to discover more than this by reading between the lines, but there was nothing more to find. How was it she had found so little to send him? For her he had found words like burning coals dropping from his pen.

When his valet brought him his mail, Mariolle's eyes always searched among the letters for the longed-for handwriting. When he had found it, an involuntary emotion would surge up in his heart, making it throb wildly; he always took this letter first, and would dwell on the address before tearing open the envelope. What would she say? Would the word "love" be there? She had never yet used that word without adding "well" or "very much"; "I love you well," or "I love you very much." How thoroughly he was used to this formula that lost all power by using additional words! Can there be much or little in loving?

To love "very much" is to love poorly: one "loves"—that is all—it cannot be modified or completed without being nullified. It is a short word, but it contains all: it means the body, the soul, the life, the entire being. We feel it as we feel the warmth of the blood, we breathe it as we breathe the air, we carry it in ourselves as we carry our thoughts. Nothing more exists for us. It is not a word; it is an inexpressible state indicated by four letters. Mariolle had become the victim of this little verb; and his eye ran along the lines trying to decipher in them some revelation of tenderness resembling his own. He certainly found enough to justify him in saying: "She loves me well," but never what would enable him to cry: "She loves me!" Her letters continued the pretty and poetical romance begun at Mont St. Michel; it was literature relating to love, but it was not love.

When he had finished reading and rereading her letters he would put the cherished sheets carefully in a drawer, and sit down in his easy-chair, where he passed many hours devoted to sad thoughts.

After a while she wrote but rarely, tired no doubt of repeating the same things over and over. Besides, she was undergoing a sort of social crisis that

André had felt approaching, with that increase of suffering which the slightest disagreeable incident will produce in troubled souls. It was a winter of fêtes. Paris was in the grip of a whirlwind of pleasure: all night long, fiacres and coupés rolled along the streets, with apparitions of white-clad women behind their windows. Nothing was spoken of but comedies, balls, matinées and soirées. It was like an epidemic of pleasure attacking all classes of society, and Mme. de Burne did not escape the contagion.

It began with her by a success attained at a ballet performed at the Austrian Embassy. Through the intervention of the Comte de Bernhaus, relations had been established between Mme. de Burne and the ambassador's wife, the Princess de Malten, who had taken a violent fancy to her. They became intimate friends in a short time, and by this means Mme. de Burne obtained the entrée to the most exclusive circle of diplomatic and aristocratic society. Her grace, beauty and intelligence, her rare wit, soon enabled her to make good her footing there; she became the fashion, and soon the carriages of the élite found the way to her door. Every Monday a long file of them with armorial bearings emblazoned on their doors stood along the sidewalk in the Rue du Général Foy, and her servants, losing their heads, confused duchesses with marchionesses, countesses with baronesses, in announcing the high-sounding names at the door of the salon.

Mme. de Burne was enraptured. The compliments and invitations lavished on her, the homage tendered, the feeling of having become one of that elect band, flattered and adored by all Paris, the joy of seeing herself petted, admired, sought everywhere inspired in her an intense spirit of snobbishness.

Her artistic clan rose in revolt; and this bond of common feeling brought about an intimate alliance among the band of friends. Even Fresnel was welcomed into the body corporate: he was enrolled and became a force in the league of which Mariolle was the head, the others well knowing the influence he wielded with her, and the friendship she entertained for him. But he could do nothing except look on helplessly at her floating joyously away on the tide of popularity and society, like a boy gazing aloft at his red balloon that has broken away and is mounting toward the clouds.

He felt that that great and secret happiness which he had never entirely despaired of was now drifting away from him forever. He was jealous of everything and everybody, of men, of women, of inanimate things. He detested all that pertained to the life she was now leading, all the people she met, all the fêtes she attended, the balls, the concerts, the theatres, for each took a portion of her being, and they absorbed her days and nights. This fierce resentment corroded his soul; his health began to suffer, and his altered appearance struck Mme. de Burne, who asked him:

"What is the matter with you? You are changed: you have got so thin!"

"The matter is that I love you too much," he replied.

She flashed him a grateful glance, murmuring:

"One cannot love too much, mon ami!"

"Do I hear *you* say that?"

"Why, of course!"

"You do not comprehend that I am dying of loving you in vain!"

"In the first place, you do not love me in vain; and, in the second, people do not die of love. To sum up, all my friends are jealous of you, which proves that you cannot be so very badly treated by me."

"You do not understand," he said, taking her hand.

"Yes, I do; I understand you very well."

"You understand the desperate appeal that I am continually addressing to your heart?"

"Yes, I understand it, and it causes me much pain, for I love you enormously. But then——"

"Well?"

"You see, you keep saying to me: 'Be like me; think, feel and express yourself as I do.' But I can't, my poor boy. I am as I am. You will have to accept me as God made me, since I have given myself to you, a thing which I do not regret, which I have never desired to retract, for you are to me dearer than any being that I have ever met."

"You do not love me!"

"I love you with all the power of loving that is in me. If the power is not greater than it is, is it my fault?"

"If I felt sure of the truth of what you say, I should be able to content myself."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I believe you to be capable of loving more intensely, but that I also believe myself incapable of evoking a real feeling of love in you."

"You are mistaken, mon ami. You are more to me than any one has ever yet been or ever will be. I believe this absolutely, at least. When with you I possess the great merit of being truthful, of being sincere, of not simulating what you would desire me to feel: many women are not so sincere as this. Now, allow me credit for this, do not excite yourself, do not get overstrung; try to feel confidence in my affection, which is entirely and truly yours."

He murmured, realizing how far apart they were from each other: "Oh, what a peculiar way of understanding and speaking of love! For you, I am simply a person whom you desire to have often seated in a chair near you. For me, you are the entire world. I know only you, I feel only you, I want only you."

She smiled benignly and said:

"I know it, I guess it, I comprehend it. I am delighted at it, and say: 'Love me always as much as that if you can, for this is my greatest happiness, but do not compel me to act a farce which would be unworthy of us both.' For some time now I have been anticipating this crisis, and I feel it keenly, for I am deeply attached to you, but I cannot bend my nature and make it like yours. Take me just as I am."

"Have you ever experienced a feeling, for even a day, an hour, that you could love me differently?" he asked all at once.

She was nonplussed, and reflected for some minutes. He waited in anguish of mind, and continued:

"Now, you see, you see! You *have* dreamed of another sort of love!"

"I may have been mistaken in my own impressions for a moment," she murmured slowly.

"Oh, what a subtle, psychological quibble!" he cried. "One cannot dissect in that way the impulses of the heart!"

She mused again, interested in her own thoughts, interested in this matter, in this attack upon herself, then she said:

"Before loving you as I now love, I had imagined, I think, for a moment that I should feel for you more ardor, but in that case I should certainly have been less simple, less frank, perhaps less sincere later on."

"Why less sincere later on?"

"Because you fence love in with the formula 'All or nothing,' and in my opinion, this means, 'All at first, nothing afterward.' It is when the nothing begins that a woman commences to be insincere."

He answered in great perturbation of spirit:

"But you don't understand my wretchedness and the torture it is to me to imagine that you might have loved me differently. You have conceived this idea: therefore, there must be another whom you will love some day in this way."

"I don't believe there is," she replied unhesitatingly.

"But why? Why, since you have had the presentiment of this love, have been visited by a suspicion of this irrealizable and torturing hope of mingling your life, your soul, your flesh with those of another, of merging his being in yours and yours in his? Since you have felt the possibility of all this you will experience the reality some day."

"No. It was my imagination that misled me, and I that misled my imagination. I give you all I have to give. I have thought over all this a great deal ever since I have been your mistress. Do you notice that I fear nothing—not even words? Really, I am almost positively convinced that I cannot love more or better than I do at present. You see, I am speaking to you as I do to myself. I do this because you are so very intelligent, you grasp everything so fully, you penetrate to the root of a matter. It is best, therefore, to hide nothing from you: to do so is the only means to bind us together closely and for a long time: this is what I long for, mon ami."

He listened to her as a man dying of thirst seizes the cup tendered to him; then he fell on his knees, his forehead touching her dress. He held her little hands to his mouth, crying:

"Thank you! thank you!" When he finally raised his head to look at her, her eyes were filled with tears; then, in her turn, entwining her arms around André's neck, she drew him to her gently, and kissed him on his eyelids.

"Sit down," she said. "It is not prudent to kneel like that in here."

He sat down, and after a silence of several instants during which they gazed at each other, she asked him whether he would take her some day to the exhibition of the sculptor, Prédolé.

She had in her cabinet-de-toilette a specimen of his work, a bronze figurine, a cupid pouring water into the bath, and she wished to see the display of his entire works now on view in the Galerie Varin.

They set a date, then Mariolle rose to go.

"Will you come to Auteuil to-morrow?" she asked, very low.

"Oh, yes, indeed!"

And he left, dizzy with joy, intoxicated by the "perhaps" that never dies away in hearts that love.

CHAPTER IX

DISILLUSION

Mme. de Burne's coupé, drawn by two horses going at full trot, rolled along the Rue de Grenelle. The hail of the last wintry storm, for it was a day in early April, beat noisily against the glass of the coupé, and rebounded into the road already whitened by the icy grains. Passers-by hurried on under their umbrellas, their coat collars drawn up over their necks. After two weeks of fine weather, an odious revival of winter had set every one shivering.

Her feet in a footwarmer, her body wrapped in a coat of rich fur whose velvety caress warmed her through her dress, feeling delicious where it touched her delicate skin, the young woman was reflecting with disinclination that in an hour she would have to take a fiacre and go to meet André at Auteuil. A strong desire to send a telegram postponing the meeting almost prevailed, but she repressed the impulse, for two months ago she had promised to do this as seldom as possible. Since that time she had been making a great effort to love André as he loved her. Seeing him suffer so keenly, she had been overcome with pity, and, after the conversation during which she had kissed him on the eyelids, in a burst of real tenderness, her sincere affection for him became for a period warmer and more expansive.

Surprised at her involuntary coldness, she had asked herself why she should not, in the end, love him as much as other women did their lovers, since she felt deeply attached to him and he pleased her more than any other of her admirers.

This apathy she experienced must proceed from an indolence of the heart, which could be overcome like any other form of indolence.

She tried to overcome it. She attempted to rouse herself by thinking about him, by trying to get up a little emotion on the days of their rendezvous, and in this she succeeded at times, just as one works one's self up to feel afraid by dwelling on apparitions and burglars when alone at night. Growing interested in this game of love, she even tried to be more caressing and succeeded pretty well at first, nearly driving Mariolle wild with intense delight.

Then she imagined she felt developing in herself a fever similar to that consuming her lover. Her intermittent dream of love that had seemed realizable the evening when she decided to give herself to André, the evening of the milky mists covering the Bay of St. Michel, again appeared; not so seductive, less wrapped in clouds of ideal-

ism and poetry, but more definite, more human.

Mariolle understood, little by little. He watched the factitious ardor die down. He divined her self-sacrificing effort, and a mortal, an inconsolable grief took possession of his soul.

She knew now as well as he that the test had failed and that all hope was lost. On this April day, warmly wrapped in furs, sighing with a sensation of well-being as she heard the hail rattle against the glass, she felt her courage waver at the idea of deserting the luxurious coupé to brave the icy interior of a fiacre and go to meet André.

But she never entertained the thought of breaking away from his caresses and refusing to go to Auteuil. Well she knew that in order to captivate a man, to keep him for one's self away from rivals, it is necessary to hold him by that physical chain that was beginning to gall her: this she knew, for it is logically indisputable. Loyalty also demanded that she should go to meet him, and she desired to be loyal. So she would give herself again, she would always give herself; but why so often? Would not the meetings hold a greater charm for him, an added charm, if they took place more seldom, if they were looked upon as rare and inappreciable opportunities for bliss offered by her, which must not be lavished too prodigally?

Always, on her way to Auteuil, she felt the consciousness of bringing him a most priceless offering, an inestimable gift. When one gives in this manner, the joy of giving is inseparable from a certain sense of sacrifice: it is not the joy of being loved, it is the pride of being generous, and the contentment of making another person happy.

She even calculated that the love of André would be more likely to be durable if she refused herself occasionally to him: for all hunger is intensified by fasting, and what is sensual desire but an appetite?

As soon as she had made the resolution she decided to put it into practice that day. She would go to Auteuil, but she would feign indisposition. As soon as this determination was made, the trip for which she had felt such distaste a moment ago seemed quite easy to undertake. Smiling to herself, she understood what had brought about the change in her feelings, after a moment's consideration. She had not wished to go, because all the little details of the rendezvous were on her mind: how she always pricked her fingers with the steel pins, which she was very awkward in handling, and how she was never able to find any of her articles of apparel in the room where she had hastily divested herself of them, preoccupied already by the odious prospect of having to dress without a maid. She stopped then, struck by a thought over which she wished to ponder: was it not a little vulgar, a little repugnant to her, that idea of love at a certain hour, fixed beforehand, like a business appointment or one with a doctor or a dentist? After a long *tête-à-tête* what was more natural than a kiss shared by lips that had been uttering warm and tender speeches? But how very different was the kiss without surprise, arranged for beforehand, that she went to receive once a week, her watch in her hand. How true it was that on the days she was not to see André she

often felt vague impulses to go to him; while these feelings rarely came to her when she went to him with the precautions of a suspected thief, in a dirty fiacre, her mind distracted by a thousand other matters.

Ah! the hour for Auteuil! She had counted the minutes to it on the clocks of all her friends; she had watched it coming, minute by minute, at Mme. de Frémines', at Mme. la Marquise de Bratiane's, at the beautiful Mme. Le Prieur's, when she went about Paris on those afternoons so as to avoid being at home where an unexpected visit, or some unforeseen obstacle might prevent her getting away.

"Since I am to take a holiday, I shall not go there too early," she said to herself. So she opened at the front of her coupé a sort of little invisible panel, hidden under the black silk with which her coupé, a veritable boudoir, was lined and padded. As soon as the two tiny doors of this hiding-place were pushed back on each side, appeared a mirror on hinges, which she raised to a level with her face. Behind the mirror were placed in niches of satin different little silver articles—a powder-puff, a pencil for the lips, two perfume bottles, an inkstand, a penhandle, scissors, a tiny paper cutter. An exquisite clock, the size and shape of a gold walnut, was affixed to the silk; it indicated four o'clock.

"I have at least an hour," said Mme. de Burne to herself. She touched a spring, which made the footman seated by the coachman take the acoustic tube in his hand; taking the other end, hidden in the hangings, she put her lips to the little rock-crystal transmitter.

"To the Austrian Embassy," she ordered.

Then she looked in the mirror. She gazed at herself as she always did, with the contentment one experiences in meeting the person one loves best in the world; then she opened her coat to look at her corsage. It was a costume for the end of the winter; the collar was trimmed with a band of very fine white feathers. This trimming came up over the shoulders also, and the waist, as well, was encircled with this border of down, that gave the young woman a quaint appearance, something like that of a wild bird. On her hat, a sort of toque, other feathers appeared —a bold aigrette of vivid colors, and her strikingly pretty face, with its blonde, fluffy hair, seemed ready to fly up with the wild ducks into the gray sky through the hail.

She was still contemplating herself in the mirror when the coupé drove through the great gates of the embassy. She fastened up her coat, put down the mirror, shut the door of the recess, and said to the coachman when the coupé stopped:

"Return to the house; I do not need you any more." Then to the footman, as he came out on the steps of the entrance:

"Is the princess at home?"

"Yes, madame."

She went in, climbed the staircase, and penetrated to the little salon where the Princess de Malten was writing letters. On seeing her friend enter, the ambassador's wife rose with an exclamation of delight, her eyes shining, and they kissed each other twice on each cheek, just at the corner of the lips. They sat down together on two little chairs in front of the fire. These two

women were very congenial; they were a good deal alike, both being of the same type, developed in the same atmosphere and guided by the same tastes, although Mme. de Malten was a Swede, married to an Austrian. They exercised upon each other a mysterious and peculiar attraction, from which proceeded a sentiment of genuine contentment when together. Sometimes they would gossip without intermission for entire half days; futile gossip, interesting to them simply on account of their similarity of tastes.

"Now, you see how much I love you!" cried Mme. de Burne. "You are coming to dine with me to-night, and yet I could not resist the temptation of coming to see you. It is simply a passion, my dear!"

"A passion which I share," answered the princess, smiling. Moved by habit, each did her best to win the admiration of the other, coquettish, as if a man were present, but differently coquettish, no longer in the view of an adversary, but in that of a rival. Mme. de Burne, while chatting, often glanced at the clock. It was almost five; he had been waiting, therefore, for an hour.

"It is late enough," she said to herself, and she rose to go.

"Already?" exclaimed the princess.

"Yes, I am in a hurry. Some one is waiting for me," answered Mme. de Burne daringly. "I'd much rather stay with you, though." The princess having sent to fetch a fiacre, they embraced and parted. The horse limped painfully as it dragged the old fiacre along. Mme. de Burne seemed to feel the infirmity and fatigue herself as she noticed this; like the broken-winded animal, she found the transit long and tedious. The pleasure she felt at the idea of seeing André consoled her, but the remembrance of what she was about to do worried her.

She found him standing behind the door, half frozen; between the trees, the sleety showers were descending, whirled by the wind, the hail rattling on their umbrellas as they went toward the cottage, their feet deep in the mud. The garden was withered, dead, miry. André looked very pale; he was suffering.

"Dieu! how cold the weather is!" she exclaimed, as they entered. A fire was blazing in the room; as it had been lighted since noon only, the house was damp, and she felt herself shiver.

"I don't think I'll take off my furs at once," she remarked. She opened the front of her coat only, and revealed the feather-trimmed corsage, in which she looked like a bird of passage. He sat down beside her.

"I'm going to give a charming dinner this evening, and I feel delighted at the prospect," she announced.

"Who is to be there?"

"Why, you, of course; then Prédolé, whom I have so longed to know."

"Prédolé is coming!"

"Yes. Lamarthe is bringing him."

"He seems rather a strange person for you to ask. Sculptors are, as a rule, scarcely the kind of men to appeal to women of your type, and Prédolé least of all."

"Oh, nonsense, my dear! I admire him so much."

During the last two months, since his exhibition at the Galerie Varin, the sculptor, Prédolé, had been the rage of Paris. He had been admired before

that; people had said, "He makes delicious figurines"; but when the artistic public had viewed all his creations assembled on exhibition, an outburst of enthusiasm had occurred. They discovered in them an unexpected charm, the outcome of the artist's special gift in reproducing elegance, making his representations of form peculiarly seductive.

He had adopted the specialty of statuettes very slightly clad, and in this had produced specimens of inimitable perfection. His danseuses, particularly, of which he had exhibited a good number, showed in their gestures, their poses, in the harmony of their attitudes and movements, the climax of feminine flexibility and grace of form.

For a month now, Mme. de Burne had been making continual efforts to induce him to come to her house; but the artist was shy, even a little boorish, it was said. She managed to succeed at last, through the intervention of Lamarthe, who had made a frenzied appeal to the grateful sculptor.

"Who else is coming?" asked Marielle.

"The Princess de Malten."

He felt annoyed; he did not like this woman.

"Who else?"

"Massival, Bernhaus and Georges de Maltry. That is all—only my élite. You know Prédolé, do you not?"

"Yes, a little."

"What do you think of him?"

"He is, above all the men I know, the one most truly in love with his art, and the most interesting when he speaks of it."

She was delighted to hear this, and said: "How charming!"

He had taken her hand under her fur coat and pressed it a little; now he kissed it. This made her remember that she had neglected to say that she did not feel well, so, seeking another pretext, she murmured:

"Dieu! how cold the weather is."

"Do you think so?"

"I am frozen to the bone."

He got up and looked at the thermometer, which was certainly indicating very low temperature; then he sat down beside her again. She had just said: "Dieu! how cold the weather is," and he imagined he knew why. During the last three weeks he had observed at each of their meetings a diminution of her efforts toward tenderness of feeling. He divined that she was weary of this simulation of affection—so weary that she could not keep it up, and he was himself exasperated to such a degree at her inability to love him, and so harassed by a mad and futile desire for this woman, that he began to say to himself: "I'd rather break with her than continue like this!"

In order thoroughly to understand her intention, he asked her: "You are not even going to take off your furs today?"

"Oh, no," she replied. "I have been coughing a little ever since the morning. This frightful weather affects my throat; I'm afraid I shall be ill." Then, after a pause: "If I had not wanted so much to see you, I should not have come at all."

As, seized with rage and torn with grief, he did not answer, she went on:

"After such beautiful weather the last two weeks, this change is very dangerous."

She gazed out into the garden, where already the trees were almost white

under the drifting snow eddying around the branches. He looked at her, thinking: "This is the sort of love she has for me!" For the first time, a sort of hatred against her possessed him, a hatred for her, for her face, her intangible soul, her body, so eagerly pursued and so elusive.

"She pretends that she is cold!" he said to himself. "She is cold just because I am here. If she were invited to some function of pleasure, one of those imbecile caprices that fill the useless existences of these useless creatures, she would brave all, she would risk life itself to go. She goes out on the coldest days in winter in an open carriage, just to display her toilets, very often. They are all alike, these women, nowadays." He looked at her, calmly facing him, and he knew that, in spite of the serenity of that adored little face, she felt an intense desire to cut short this *tête-à-tête* that was becoming so painful.

Was it possible that there ever had existed, that there existed now, women capable of passion, who, overcome by emotion, suffered, wept, gave themselves with delight, who loved with their bodies as intensely as with their souls, with the mouth that speaks, the eyes that gaze, the heart that palpitates, and the hand that caresses; women who brave all because they love, who day or night, spied on and menaced, go, intrepid and palpitating, to throw themselves into the arms of a lover? How horrible this love of his for the woman to whom he was chained; a love without result or aim, without joy or triumph, without sweetness or intoxication, that brought nothing but regret and care, suffering and tears, in its train; only suggesting the ecstasy of partaken caresses by the intolerable disappointment of kisses unreturned by those cold lips, arid and sterile as dead branches.

He looked at her, imprisoned and charming in her feather-trimmed gown. Were they not powerful enemies, enemies to be conquered even as the woman herself, these costumes, jealous guardians, coquettish and sumptuous barriers, fencing his mistress in and keeping her from him?

"Your gown is beautiful," he said; he would not touch on that which was inflicting torture upon him.

"Wait until you see the one I am going to wear to-night!" she returned, smiling. Then she gave several little coughs and said:

"I am catching cold. Let me go now, mon ami; the sun will shine again very soon, and I shall follow his example."

He did not press her to stay. He was disheartened, knowing well that no effort now could overcome the apathy of that inert love; that all was over, over forever. No hope existed of hearing passionate words issue from that serene mouth, or seeing the light of love in those calm eyes. Suddenly he felt arise in him a desire to escape from this torturing domination. She had nailed him to a cross; he bled from every pore, and she looked on, watching him in agony and not comprehending his sufferings, pleased even to have inflicted them.

He would wrench himself free from this instrument of torture even though he left there portions of his body, fragments of his flesh and all his lacerated heart. Like an animal in whom the weapons of the hunter have left a little

remnant of life, he would drag himself to some solitude where perhaps his wounds might cicatrize and thereafter betray their existence only by dull, aching pain.

"Good-by, then," he said.

Struck by the sadness of his voice, she remarked:

"We shall meet again this evening, mon ami."

"Yes, this evening," he repeated as he went with her to the garden door. Then he came back to sit alone by the fireside. Alone! Yes, it certainly was cold—and how sad! Well, it was all over now. Oh, what a horrible thought! No more hoping, expecting, dreaming of being with her, dreaming with that glow at the heart that at times makes of beings on this dull earth, for some ineffable moments, beacons illuminating the rayless night. Good-by to those nights of solitary emotion, when he walked the room till almost daylight, thinking of her; and the awakenings when he would say, opening his eyes: "I shall meet her in a few hours in our little cottage."

How he loved her! How long and hard the task would be to cure himself of this! She went away because the weather was cold! He recalled her as she sat a little while ago there, looking at him, bewitching him, in order the more deeply to stab his heart. Well, she had already pierced it pretty thoroughly; he could feel the hole, an old gaping wound, opened just now anew by the knife of her utter indifference so that it was now incurable; he could feel something flowing from it, surging up in him and choking him. Placing his hands before his eyes, as if to hide his weakness from himself, he began to weep. She went away because the weather was cold! He would have walked, naked, through the snow anywhere to meet her. He would have jumped from a roof, only to fall at her feet. The recollection of an old legend occurred to him, one attached to the "Hill of the Two Lovers," seen on going to Rouen. A young girl, obeying the mandate of a cruel father who forbade her marrying her lover unless she carried him to the top of the mountain, dragged him there, walking on her hands and feet, but fell dead on gaining the summit. Love is nothing now except a legend: a legend useful for furnishing material for songs or romantic fabrications. Had she not, herself, uttered at one of their first interviews a sentiment which he had never forgotten? "The men of to-day do not love the women of this era to the degree of inflicting injury on themselves. Believe me, I know them, both the men and the women." She had made a mistake as far as he was concerned, but not with regard to herself, for she had gone on to say: "As for me, I warn you that I am incapable of deep feeling for any one—no matter whom." "No matter whom!" Was she sure? For him she was right, he was aware of that; but for another? She could not love him; but why not? Then the consciousness of having missed everything life had to offer overcame him: a consciousness which had long since taken possession of him.

He had done nothing, succeeded in nothing, obtained nothing, conquered nothing. Art had tempted him, but he had lacked the courage to devote himself to any special branch and the persistency necessary to insure victory. No

success had come to rejoice him, no elevated tastes of any kind had ennobled or exalted his character. The one sincere, whole-hearted effort he had made to conquer the heart of a woman had proved futile, like everything else he had attempted; at best he was nothing but a failure. He continued to weep, his hands covering his eyes, the tears trickling down on to his mustache and lips.

When he again raised his head he saw that it was night. He just had time to go home and dress to go to Mme. de Burne's dinner.

CHAPTER X

A FAREWELL

André Mariolle was the first guest to arrive at Mme. de Burne's that evening. He sat down and gazed around him at the walls, at all the objects that he had loved because they were hers—the paintings, the bibelots, the furniture, all that familiar interior, where he had learned to know her, where he had felt his passion intensify from day to day, until it had won its useless victory. How often and how ardently he had waited in this pretty room made expressly for her—a delicious setting for an exquisite gem. How well he knew the odor of the salon, clinging to the hangings and all its belongings—the simple, aristocratic scent of the iris. In this spot he had trembled with expectation, had pulsed with hope, had run the gamut of all the emotions. He pressed as if they were the hands of a friend that he was forsaking the arms of the large fauteuil in which he had so often sat chatting with her, watching her talk and smile. He would have liked her not to come into the room; have liked it to remain with him its only occupant, remaining all through the night, dreaming of his love, as one watches over the body of a beloved one; and then to have gone away at dawn for a long time, perhaps forever.

The door opened. She entered and came toward him, her hand outstretched. He mastered himself and betrayed no emotion. This was not a woman, but a bouquet of flowers—an inimitable bouquet. A band of pinks clasped her waist and fell all around her down to her feet in cascades. Around her bare arms and shoulders ran a garland of myosotis and lilies of the valley, while three fairylike orchids seemed to proceed from her throat and caress the pale flesh of her bosom with their supernatural pink and red. Her blond hair was dotted with enamel violets, in which flashed diamonds; and other brilliants, trembling on gold pins, scintillated like drops of water in the perfumed trimming of her dress.

"I shall have a headache," she said, "but I can't help that. This is very becoming."

She smelt like a garden in springtime, and looked fresher than her flowery adornments. André looked at her, daz-

zled, and thinking that it would be as barbarous to take her in his arms at this moment as to trample on a beautiful flowerbed. Women's bodies were nothing but pretexts for display, objects for ornamentation, nowadays; they were not meant to inspire love. They looked like flowers, like birds, like hundreds of things as much as like women. Their mothers, all the women of past generations, employed art to enhance their beauty, but they tried, above all, to please by the natural seduction of their bodies, their grace, the irresistible attraction that the feminine being exercises over the hearts of men. To-day, coquetry was the whole armament, artifice the means and also the end, for they made use of it more to irritate their rivals and to excite their envy and jealousy than to captivate men.

For whom was this toilet got up—for him, the lover, or to humiliate the Princesse de Malten?

The door opened and she was announced. Mme. de Burne sprang toward her, and carefully mindful of the safety of the orchids, she embraced her with a little cry of delight, and a kiss, a pretty and most desirable kiss was exchanged by the two mouths. Mariolle quivered with anguish. Never had she run toward him with such happy impetuosity; never had she kissed him with such fervor, and again the words occurred to him: "These women are not made for us."

Massival appeared, then behind him M. de Pradon, the Comte de Bernhaus and Georges de Maltry, resplendent with English chic. Only Lamarthe and Prédolé were now wanting to complete the party. They began to speak of the sculptor, and every voice was raised in eulogy.

"He had resuscitated the grace, regained the traditions of the Renaissance with something additional—modern sincerity. He was, according to M. Georges de Maltry, the exquisite exponent of human flexibility." These sentences had for two months now been going the rounds of all the salons, given out by all mouths, listened to by all ears.

At last he made his appearance. Every one was surprised. He was a short man, of uncertain age, with the shoulders of a peasant and a strong face, with well-marked features and grizzly hair and beard, a powerful nose, thick lips, and a timid and embarrassed air. He held his arms rather far from his body, a habit attributable, no doubt, to the enormous hands that protruded from his sleeves. They were broad, thick, with hairy, muscular fingers, the hands of a Hercules, or a butcher, and they appeared clumsy and embarrassed at being en évidence, but impossible to hide.

His face, however, was illumined by a pair of bright, piercing gray eyes of extraordinary vivacity. They seemed the only live part of this dense, heavy man. They looked, scrutinized, searched, flashed everywhere, with sharp, rapid and mobile glances, and it was felt that a great and quick intelligence directed the movements of these questioning eyes.

Mme. de Burne, a little disappointed, politely indicated a chair, and the artist sat down. He sat there, confused, scarcely knowing what to say. Lamarthe, adroit in matters of tact, wishing to relieve him, went up to his friend.

"Mon cher," he said, "I wish to

show you where you are. You have already seen our divine hostess; now look at all she surrounds herself with."

He pointed to an authentic bust by Houdon on the mantel; then, on a Boule writing-desk, two women dancing, with their arms entwined, by Clodion; finally, on an étagère, four Tanagra statuettes, chosen from among the most perfect specimens. Then the face of Prédolé lighted, as if he had been wandering in a desert and had suddenly met one of his children. He got up and walked toward the little antique figures, and when he seized two of them at a time in his formidable hands, Mme. de Burne feared for them. But as soon as he had grasped them it almost seemed as if he were caressing them, he handled them with such surprising supple adroitness, twisting them about in his thick fingers, suddenly become agile as those of a juggler. Watching him look at and touch these figures, it became evident that this heavy, stout man had in his soul and in his hands an ideal and delicate tenderness.

"Do you think them pretty?" asked Lamarthe.

Then the sculptor descanted on their beauty and spoke of other remarkable figures he knew of in a rather husky voice, but quietly and decidedly, his language being dictated by an astute mind that weighed and understood well the value of words. Conducted by the novelist, he then inspected the other rare bibelots which madame had accumulated, thanks to the counsels of her friends. He appreciated them with joy and astonishment at finding them in this place; and he always took them in his hands and turned them about on all sides, as if to put himself into tender contact with them. A bronze statuette, heavy as a cannon-ball, was hidden in a dark corner; raising it with one hand, he brought it near a lamp, admired it in a leisurely manner, then put it back in its place without visible effort.

"He's built to struggle with stone and marble, that chap!" remarked Lamarthe. They all looked at the sculptor with interest.

A servant announced: "Madame is served."

The mistress of the house took the arm of the sculptor, to pass into the dining-room, and when she had made him sit at her right, she asked him, with courtesy, just as she would have interrogated the scion of some illustrious house as to the origin of the family name:

"Your art, monsieur, has the merit of being the most ancient of all the arts, has it not?"

"Mon Dieu, madame!" he answered in his quiet voice, "the shepherds in the Bible played the flute; music appears the most ancient, although, in our sense, real music does not date very far back. But veritable sculpture goes a long way back."

"Do you like music?" she asked.

"I love all the arts," he answered, with grave conviction.

"Is the inventor of yours known to fame?" she asked again.

He thought a moment; then, with a gentleness of speech as if he were relating a touching story, he answered:

"According to tradition, it was the Greek Dædalus. But the prettiest legend is that which attributes the invention to a potter of Sicyone named Dibutades. His daughter, Kora, having outlined

with an arrow the shadow of her fiancé's profile, the father filled in the silhouette with clay and modelled it; then my art was born!"

Lamarthe murmured: "Charming!" After a silence, he said: "Ah! if only you would, Prédolé!" Then, addressing Mme. de Burne, he said:

"You don't know, madame, how interesting this man is when he talks of what he loves; how well he knows how to describe it and to make all others adore it!"

But the sculptor did not seem inclined to pose or to make speeches. He had tucked his napkin into the front of his shirt, so as not to soil his dress-coat, and he was eating his soup with the attention, even respect that peasants always feel for that part of the dinner. Then he drank a glass of wine, and sat up, looking more at ease and as if he were becoming acclimated. From time to time he tried to turn round, for he perceived, reflected in a mirror, a modern group of statuary, placed behind him on the mantel. He did not know it, and sought to find out the sculptor. At last, being no longer able to stand it, he asked:

"That is one of Falguière's, is it not?"

"Yes, it is one of Falguière's," answered Mme. de Burne, smiling. "But how did you find that out, just in the mirror?"

"Madame, I recognize, it does not matter how, at a single glance the sculpture of men who also do painting, and the painting of men who also do sculpture. It is never the same as the work of a man who confines himself strictly to one art."

Lamarthe, wishing his friend to shine, demanded explanations of this, and Prédolé gave them. He defined and characterized the paintings of sculptors and the sculpture of painters, in so clear, original, and novel a manner, in his slow, precise way, that the guests listened as much with their eyes as with their ears. He went back in the history of art, epoch by epoch, citing examples of each, till he reached the first Italian masters, painters and sculptors at the same time: Nicolas and Jean de Pise, Donatello, Lorenzo Ghiberti. He quoted the opinions of Diderot on the same subject, and in conclusion, cited the gates of the baptistery of St. Jean de Florence by Ghiberti, bas-reliefs so vivid and dramatic that they look like paintings on canvas. With his great hands working in front of him as if they were full of material to be modelled, and moving so lightly and flexibly that they delighted the eye, he reconstructed the specimens of art under consideration with such conviction that every one followed with interest, his fingers creating in the air above the plates and glasses all the images described in words. Then, on being offered something he was fond of, he left off talking and began to eat. During the rest of the dinner he spoke little, scarcely following the conversation, which veered from theatrical gossip to politics, from a ball to a marriage, an article in the Revue des Deux Mondes to the horse races, recently opened. He ate well and drank moderately, without appearing to be affected by it, having a clear, strong, sane head, not easily disturbed by good wine.

When they had returned to the salon, Lamarthe, who had not yet obtained all he wished from the sculptor, drew

him to a glass case and showed him a priceless bibelot, a silver inkstand engraved by Benvenuto Cellini.

Then a sort of intoxication seemed to overcome Prédolé. He contemplated the inkstand as if it were the face of a mistress, and, seized with emotion, gave utterance in regard to the work of Benvenuto Cellini of ideas as fine and graceful as the work of that divine engraver himself; then, seeing that all were listening, he let himself go, he warmed to the subject, and, seated in a deep easy-chair, holding and gazing continually at the gem which had been put into his hands, he related his impressions on all the marvels of art known to him, revealed his sensibility, and showed the strange intoxication produced in his soul by the influence of forms of grace observed by the eye. For ten years he had wandered over the face of the earth, observing only marble, stone, bronze and wood, carved by cunning hands, or gold, silver, ivory and brass metamorphosed into chefs-d'œuvre under the fairy fingers of engravers. And he himself worked as he spoke, creating bas-reliefs and delicious, modelled objects evolved in the mind by the precision and expressiveness of his diction.

All the men seated around him hung upon his words, while the women seated near the fire seemed rather bored, chatting in a low voice from time to time, wondering how any one could feel so enthralled by talking over so simple a matter as the contours of objects.

When Prédolé left off, Lamarthe, excited and delighted, pressed his hand, and said, in a voice softened by the influence of a common love:

"Really, I feel like embracing you. You are the only artist, the only impassioned and great artist of to-day; the only one who really loves what he works at, finds happiness in it, never weariness or disgust. You handle art, eternal art, in its purest, simplest, highest, most inaccessible form. You create the beautiful by the curves of a line and you care for nothing else on earth. I drink your health in a glass of eau-de-vie!"

Then the conversation became general, but it hung fire, stifled by the ideas that had been given out in that pretty salon furnished with precious objects. Prédolé left early, giving as his excuse that he began work every morning at daybreak. When he had gone, Lamarthe, enthusiastic, asked Mme. de Burne:

"Well, how did you like him?"

She answered hesitatingly, with an indifferent look:

"Oh, well enough; but he is rather long-winded."

The novelist smiled, thinking: "Parbleu! he did not admire your toilet; and you are the only bibelot here that he scarcely noticed." After some polite speeches, he went over to the Princess de Malten, in order to flirt with her. The Comte de Bernhaus came up to the hostess, and, seating himself on a little tabouret, seemed to be prostrate at her feet. Mariolle, Massival, Maltry and M. de Pradon continued to speak of the sculptor, who had greatly impressed them. M. de Maltry compared him to the ancient masters whose entire lives were illuminated and embellished by the exclusive and over-mastering love of manifestations of beauty, and he elaborated his opinion with subtle, exact, and elaborate phrases that were rather tiresome.

Massival, tired of hearing an art spoken of that was not his own, went over to Mme. de Malten and sat next to Lamarthe, who soon gave up his place to him, going to rejoin the other men.

"Shall we go?" said he to Mariolle.

"Yes—willingly."

The novelist enjoyed talking at night, going along the street, accompanying some one home. His dry, strident voice seemed to cling to and climb up the walls of the houses. He felt himself to be eloquent and clear-sighted, witty and original on these nocturnal *tête-à-têtes*, when he monologued rather than chatted. He earned for himself a quiet success that soothed him, and he prepared himself a quiet night's rest by this slight fatigue of the legs and the lungs.

Mariolle was at the end of his endurance. All his misery, his ill-fortune, his grief, all his irremediably bitter disappointment had been seething in his heart ever since he crossed her threshold that evening. He could stand no more; he would go away, never to return. When he said adieu to Mme. de Burne, she returned his farewell with an absent-minded air. The sidewalks had become gray and dry again, but in the roadway patches of wet still shone in the gaslight. Lamarthe said:

"What a happy man Prédolé is! He loves only one thing, his art; thinks only of that, lives only for that, and it fills, brightens and makes his existence happy. He is emphatically an artist of the old kind; he does not care much about women, that man—our kind of women, that is, with the ornaments, the laces and other disguises. Do you notice how little attention he paid to our fine ladies, who are, nevertheless, very fascinating? All that appeals to him is plastic art; nothing artificial. It is true that our charming hostess judged him insupportable and imbecile. In her eyes, a Houdon bust, an inkstand by Benvenuto Cellini, Tanagra figurines, are only little ornaments created for the setting of a rich chef-d'œuvre—herself! Herself and her dress, for her dress is a great part of herself; it is the new note which she gives each day to her beauty. How frivolous and personal a woman is!"

He stopped and knocked the sidewalk with so sharp a rap of his cane that the noise reverberated for some time along the street. Then he went on:

"They know, understand and enjoy what makes them effective—dress and jewelry, which change in fashion every ten years—but they know nothing of any subject that requires delicate artistic penetration and a purely æsthetic, impersonal exercise of the senses. Besides, they have very rudimentary senses; the senses of women are not capable of a high degree of training, they are not susceptible to anything that does not appeal directly to their feminine egotism. Their cleverness is that of the savage, the Indian, of combat and trapping. They are even incapable of enjoying lower material delights that require the education and strict attention of a physical organ, such as the palate; and if any exceptions do chance to respect good cookery, they go no farther, for they are incapable of appreciating good wine; that addresses itself only to the gustatory organs of men—for good wine speaks."

He gave a tap of his cane on the pavement, which accentuated the last

word and gave point to the sentence, then he went on:

"One must not expect too much of them. But this absence of taste and comprehension, which limits their intellectual vision when it has to do with elevated things, blinds them still more when it has to do with us. To attract them, it is not necessary, as it was in other days, to possess soul, heart, intelligence, or exceptional and high attributes, as when women loved a man for his high-mindedness or his courage. Those of to-day are strolling players, the strolling players of love, repeating the words of a piece which they act from tradition, but which they do not believe in. To act it they need men who are strolling players, too, to complete the lines and to fill out the lying piece."

They walked on some moments in silence, side by side. Mariolle had listened, mentally repeating the phrases, mutely approving the verdict of his friend with all the grief in his heart. He knew, moreover, that an Italian, Prince Epiati, a sort of adventurer, had come to give fencing lessons in Paris, that he was much spoken of, and that his elegance and supple vigor, exhibited in aristocratic circles and in the cocoterie of the élite, enhanced by a costume of clinging black silk, was monopolizing the attention and the coquettish efforts of the little Baronne de Frémines. As Lamarthe continued to be silent, he said:

"Well, it's our fault! We choose the wrong sort. There must be other kinds of women."

"The only ones capable of love," answered the novelist, "are the shop girls and the sentimental young women of the middle classes, poor or badly married. They are overflowing with sentiment, but such vulgar sentiment that to expose ours to contact with it seems to profane it. Now, what I say is this: That in our class of life, where the women need and desire nothing except to be amused without running any risks, and where the men have subordinated pleasure to the same rules and regulations as work, the old, charming, powerful attraction that caused the sexes to gravitate toward each other has disappeared."

Mariolle murmured: "It is true."

His desire to escape increased—to escape far from these people, these puppets, who because they had nothing to do mimicked the passionate life, beautiful and tender, of other days, incapable of tasting the sweetness of it.

"Good-night," said he, "I am going to bed."

He went in, sat at his table, and wrote:

Adieu, madame. Do you remember my first letter? I said adieu then, but I did not go. What a mistake I made: Need I explain to you why I say this? Men like me never should meet women of your type; if I had been an artist, and if my emotions had been capable of expression in such a manner as to afford me relief, you might have endowed me with inspiration; but, as it is, I am only an unhappy being whom love for you has filled with horrible and unendurable pain. When I first met you I never should have believed myself capable of feeling and suffering in this manner. Any other woman in your place would, in animating my heart, have inspired it with happiness—but you have simply tortured it. I know it is in spite of yourself. I do not reproach you and

I bear you no ill-will. I have not even the right to send you these lines; forgive me for doing so. You are so created that you cannot so much as guess at what I experience when I go to see you, when you speak to me, when I look at you. Yes—you consent, you accept me, and you even offer me a calm and peaceful happiness for which I ought to thank you on my knees all my life. But I do not desire it. Ah! what a fate is his who demands of the woman he ardently loves the boon of a fervent word, a passionate caress, and who never receives it! I am famished for want of love, like a poor beggar who has stood in vain with outstretched hand for many weary days at your gates. You have thrown me from time to time costly gifts, but never a morsel of bread, and it was bread, love, that I needed. I am going away, miserable and poor, beggared of your tenderness, a few crumbs of which might have saved me. All I have now in the world is a cruelly haunting thought which I must do my utmost to kill; and this is what I am going away to do. Pardon, thanks, pardon! I love you with my whole soul.

Adieu. ANDRÉ MARIOLLE.

CHAPTER XI

A CHANGE OF SCENE

A RADIANT morning was gilding all Paris. Mariolle got into the carriage waiting for him at his door with two trunks and a suitcase behind. He had made his valet pack the night before everything necessary for a long absence, and was leaving as his provisional address Fontainebleau, Poste-restante. He was going entirely alone, wishing to leave behind everything that could possibly recall Paris.

"Gare de Lyon!" he cried to the driver, and the fiacre started on its way. Then he began to think of that other departure—the leaving for Mont St. Michel last summer; in three months it would be a year since then. But he must not dwell on these thoughts, and he looked out into the street.

The carriage was entering the Avenue des Champs Elysées, bathed in a flood of spring sunlight. The budding leaves, already freed from their brown coverings by the warm weather of the preceding weeks and uninjured by the two days of hail and cold rain, seemed almost visibly to open, so quickly did they unfold on this luminous morning; and Mariolle perceived a subtle odor of sap and growing branches. It was one of those mornings of budding life when one feels that in the public gardens and along the avenues the horse-chestnuts will blossom out in a day or two, the horse-chestnuts like lustres lighting up on chandeliers. Earthly life was in process of awakening all around: even the bituminous pavement seemed to quiver dully, as if upheaved by the stirring roots beneath. Shaken by the jolts of the fiacre, he thought to himself: "At last I am going to have peace of mind.

I am going to watch the birth of spring in the forest."

The journey seemed a long one. He was as much unstrung by these few hours of sleeplessness spent in dwelling on his grief as if he had watched for ten nights by the bedside of a dying man. When he got to Fontainebleau he went straight to a notary's office, to ascertain if there was not some furnished cottage to let near the forest; he was told of several. The one whose photograph attracted him the most had just been vacated by a young couple who had spent the winter at the village of Montigny-sur-Loing. The notary, although a sedate man, smiled, evidently suspecting a love affair. He asked:

"You are alone, monsieur?"

"I am alone."

"No servants, even?"

"No servants, even. I left mine in Paris, and I shall engage some in the neighborhood. I came here wishing to work in perfect isolation."

"Oh, you'll easily have that at this season of the year."

A few moments later, Mariolle and his trunks were in an open landau, on the way to Montigny. The forest was awakening. The tops of the great trees were beginning to be clothed with a dark shadow of green; the underbrush, however, was more advanced, and the birches, with their silver trunks, seemed already in their early summer garb. The immense oaks showed only trembling patches of verdure at the tips of their branches. The beeches, responding still later to the call of spring before opening their pointed buds, were dropping the last dead leaves of the previous autumn. All along the way the grass, not yet shaded by the impenetrable branches, was stiff, shining as if varnished by the new sap, and the odor of nascent vegetation, already noticed by Mariolle in the Champs Elysées that morning, was all around him now, like a bath of germinating life under the vivifying sun. He drew in the air with long breaths, like a captive just liberated, and with the feeling of a man whose fetters have just been broken, he stretched himself back in the landau, allowing his arms to hang on either side, his hands dropping above the wheels. How good it was to draw in this splendid, free, pure air! He must continue breathing it a long, long time; he would have to do so, in order to saturate himself sufficiently to allay his sufferings, and to feel its grateful zephyrs entering through his lungs and playing soothingly on his heart-wound.

He went through Marlotte, where the driver showed him the "Hôtel Corot," then just opened, whose originality was much spoken of. Then they followed a road commanding the forest on the left, and on the right a great plain, with trees here and there and hills on the horizon. Finally they entered a long village street, a blindingly white street between two rows of little houses roofed with tiles; near one occasionally an enormous lilac covered with blossoms overtopped a wall.

This street followed a valley which descended to the bank of a river. When Mariolle saw it he was delighted; it was a narrow river, rapid, noisy and swirling, on one side washing the walls of gardens, on the other side meadows, with trees whose branches were slowly leafing out.

Mariolle had no trouble in finding the house indicated by the notary, and was

charmed with it. It was an old house restored by an artist who had spent five years there; then, having grown tired of it, had rented it. It was very near the river, separated from it only by a garden ending in a terrace bordered by yews. The Loing, which here fell over a dam one or two feet high, ran alongside the terrace with loud murmurings. From the windows of the front of the house one could see the meadows on the other side of the river.

"I shall get cured here," thought Mariolle. He had arranged matters with the notary in case he should be pleased with the house, and the driver of the landau returned with his answer. Now he had to see about moving in, which did not take long, the secretary of the mayor sending him two servants, one to cook, the other to look after his linen and to see to the house.

Downstairs there were a parlor, a dining-room, a kitchen and two other small rooms; on the next floor a handsome bedroom and another room which the artist proprietor had made his atelier. All these were beautifully furnished by a man evidently in love with the country and the house; but now the freshness had departed and the house was a little out of order, with a deserted air such as a house wears whose master has abandoned it.

He could tell, however, that it had not been long unoccupied: a sweet odor of verbena clung around it still. Mariolle said to himself: "Aha! verbena! A very simple perfume. The wife of the last tenant was evidently not a woman of extravagant tastes. Happy man!"

Night was approaching, all this business having taken time. He sat down near an open window, drinking in the sweet, humid freshness of the damp grass and watching the setting sun cast long shadows across the meadows.

The voices of the two servants preparing the dinner ascended the stairway, and through the window came the lowing of the cows, the barking of dogs and the shouts of men driving animals or talking to their friends across the river. Mariolle asked himself for the hundredth time that day: "What did she think when she got my letter? What will she do?" Then he wondered: "What is she doing at this moment?"

He looked at his watch—half-past six. "She has gone home and is receiving."

A vision rose before him of the salon and the young woman chatting with the Princess de Malten, Mme. de Frémines, Massival and the Comte de Bernhaus. His soul at once became filled with rage. He wanted to be there; this was the hour at which he went there every day, and he felt within himself an uneasiness, not a regret, for his determination was unchanged; but a sort of physical uneasiness, akin to that experienced by an opium fiend when he has failed to obtain his dose of the drug at the accustomed hour. He no longer saw the meadows or the sun disappearing behind the hills on the horizon; he only saw her in the midst of friends, engrossed by that worldly life that had robbed him of her.

"I will not think of it any more!" he said aloud.

He got up and went down into the garden, and walked to the terrace. The coolness of the water leaping over the weir arose in mist from the river, and the sensation of the damp cold chilled his already heavy heart and made him

retrace his steps. The table was set in the dining-room. He dined quietly; then, having nothing to do, feeling conscious of that uneasiness of soul and body increasing, he went to bed and tried to sleep. But in vain. His mind saw, his mind suffered, his mind never left that woman.

Who would be the favored one now? The Comte de Bernhaus, no doubt. He was exactly suited to this woman who so loved display, that elegant, distingué man! He must have pleased her, for she had exercised all the wiles at her command upon him, although seeming to love another. Under the obsession of these harassing ideas he nevertheless grew sleepy, and fell into slumberous wanderings in which she and the comte constantly appeared to him. Real sleep refused to come, and all night he saw these two, haunting him, braving and irritating him, disappearing long enough just for him to drop into sleep and then coming back and waking him to feel that awful ache of jealousy in his heart. He got out of bed at the first streak of dawn and went into the forest, cane in hand, a stout cane left behind by a former occupant.

The rising sun gilded the almost bare tops of the oaks, fell on the soft turf visible in spots and on the patches of dead leaves, survivors of the previous year. Yellow butterflies, like little dancing flames, fluttered along the way. A hill, almost a mountain, covered with pines and bluish rocks, appeared on the right side of the road. Mariolle climbed it slowly, and when he had reached the top, sat down on a big stone. He was already panting; his legs refused to carry him, quaking with weakness, his heart palpitated, and all his body seemed aching and bruised. He knew that this did not proceed from fatigue; it came from that love weighing upon him like an intolerable burden, and he moaned: "What misery!"

His attention, over-excited and sharpened by the dread of this condition that would perhaps be so difficult to change, now turned to himself, and he searched his soul, looked into his innermost consciousness, trying to understand better what manner of man he was, and to reveal to his own eyes the reason of this inexplicable attack of weakness.

He said to himself:

"I am not a passionate man, nor a dreamer. I have more judgment than instinct, curiosity than appetite, imagination than persistency. At bottom I am merely a fastidious, delicate and intelligent voluptuary. I have enjoyed the good things of this life without attaching myself too strongly to them; have enjoyed them with the discrimination of an expert who tastes but does not become intoxicated, who understands them too well to lose his head over them. I reason over everything, and I, as a rule, analyze my tastes too well to be subjugated by them blindly. This is my great failing, the sole cause of my weakness, And yet, this woman has taken possession of me in spite of myself, in spite of my fear and my knowledge of her; she possesses me just as if she had taken away, one by one, all the different aspirations existing in me.

"I was drawn toward inanimate things; toward music which allures me, nature which softens me, thought which is the epicureanism of the spirit, and toward all that is agreeable and beautiful on earth. Then I encountered a

creature who summoned together all my wavering impulses and desires, and, aiming them toward herself, out of them created love. Pretty and graceful, she pleased my eyes; witty and intelligent, she pleased my soul, and she pleased my heart by a mysterious sympathy experienced in her presence and evolved by contact with her; also by a secret and irresistible sort of magnetism which conquered me just as certain plants stupefy persons who come near them. She has monopolized me completely, for I now aspire to nothing, wish for nothing, desire nothing and care for nothing on earth. Before I knew her, with what delight should I have watched this forest awakening into life! To-day I do not see it, I do not feel it. I am not in it. I am always with this woman whom I wish no longer to love. But I must cease! I must try to chase these thoughts away by fatigue; otherwise, I shall not cure myself."

He got up, descended the rocky hill, and began to walk with long strides. But this obsession weighed him down as if it were a great burden he was carrying. He went on, walking faster and faster, meeting occasionally, when he caught sight of a patch of sunlight on the turf under the branches, or felt a resinous whiff from a clump of fir trees, a brief sensation of comfort, like a presentiment of consolation in the distance. All at once he stopped: "I am not walking, I am fleeing!" He was fleeing, it is true; fleeing, pursued by the anguish of this shattered love. Then he began to walk more quietly. The forest changed its aspect, became more umbrageous, for he was entering that part where beeches predominate. There was no sensation now of winter, just a feeling of spring as fresh and young as if it had only come into being that very day. Mariolle penetrated into the thickets under the gigantic trees which seemed to grow taller and taller. He walked a long time, an hour, two hours, through the branches and through the innumerable hosts of tiny green, glistening leaves. The great arch of the tops of the trees supported by columns slanting or straight, sometimes whitish, sometimes dark with black moss, veiled the sky now from him. The trees stood one behind the other, in indefinite number, dominating the shrubs at their feet and covering them with thick shade, through which, however, shafts of sunlight managed to percolate. The rays pierced their way in through the foliage, which no longer looked like a wood, but a brilliant, vaporous mass of verdure flecked with luminous gleams.

Mariolle stopped short, seized with inexpressible admiration. Where was he? In a forest, or had he fallen to the bottom of the sea, a sea all leaves and light, an ocean gilded with greenish sunlight?

He felt better, farther from his sorrow, more hidden, calmer, and he lay on the ground on the russet carpet of dead leaves which these trees only part with in gaining their new foliage. Luxuriating in the contact with the fresh, reviving earth and in the pure sweetness of the air, he was soon seized by a desire, at first vague, then more definite, not to be alone in this heavenly spot. He said to himself: "Oh, if she were only here with me!"

Suddenly Mont St. Michel stood before him, and he recalled how different she had been then from what she had been in Paris, in that awakening of love

vitalized by the winds from afar, by the neighborhood of the great expanse of yellow sands. It seemed to him as if on that day only she had loved him a little —just for a few hours. Certainly, on the road while they followed the receding tide, in the cloister when murmuring his name, "André!" she had seemed to say: "I am yours!" On the Chemin des Fous, when he almost held her in his arms in the midst of surrounding, illimitable space, she had felt for him a sort of rapturous feeling that had evaporated when her foot touched the pavement of Paris, and had never returned. But here with him, in this bath of verdure, in this other tide made of new sap, would not the fugitive and sweet emotion felt on the coast of Normandy have re-entered her heart? He lay stretched on his back, lost in thought, his gaze fixed on the great tree-tops above, and little by little he shut his eyes, soothed by the tranquillity of his stately neighbors. At last he dropped off to sleep, and when he awoke and looked at his watch he perceived that it was half-past two.

He got up feeling less sad, less sick at soul, and set off again. Soon he emerged from the thick wood into a large open space, where six incredibly high avenues met like the points of a star, losing themselves in leafy and transparent vistas in emerald-tinted air. A post set forth a placard with the legend: "The King's Bouquet." It was certainly the kingdom of the beeches, and this carrefour was the capital. An empty carriage passed. Mariolle engaged it, and had himself driven to Marlotte, thence back to Montigny, after he had eaten at the inn, for he was hungry.

He recollected having noticed this establishment the day before—the Hôtel Corot, which had just been opened and was mediævally decorated à la "Chat Noir" in Paris. He got down there, and went through an open door into a vast hall where the old-fashioned tables and clumsy stools seemed to be awaiting roysterers of a bygone century. At the end of the room a woman, a young servant maid, no doubt, standing at the top of a small ladder, was hanging old plates on hooks too high for her to reach. Sometimes poised on the tips of both feet, sometimes on the tip of one, she stretched herself against the wall, with one hand leaning on it, a plate in the other, with graceful and pretty movements, for her waist was small and the undulating line from her wrist to her ankle underwent changing grace at each of her alterations of poise. As her back was turned, she did not hear Mariolle come in. He stopped to look at her, and the remembrance of Prédolé occurred to him.

"Ah! how pretty!" he exclaimed. "She is very supple, that little girl."

He coughed. The girl was so surprised that she nearly fell over, but as soon as she had recovered her equilibrium she jumped to the floor from the top of the ladder with the lightness of a tight-rope dancer, then came smiling toward the customer:

"Monsieur would like?"

"I should like to have breakfast, mademoiselle."

"It would more likely be dinner," she ventured to suggest. "It is half-past three."

"We shall say dinner, then, since you wish it so," he replied. "I have been lost in the forest."

Then she told him what dishes were at the disposition of customers. He

made his selection and sat down. She went to give the order, then came back and began to set the table. He followed her with his eyes and found her dainty, neat and quick. Dressed suitably for her work, her sleeves turned up, her neck bare, she had an alert little air that was pleasant to see, and her corset defined perfectly a little waist of which she was, no doubt, extremely proud. Her rather red face, flushed by the strong country air, appeared too plump, but it had the freshness of a spring flower, with its brilliant brown eyes, wide-open mouth, full of splendid teeth, and chestnut hair whose abundance indicated the vitality of the vigorous young body.

She brought radishes and butter, and he began to eat as she had vanished. Wishing to drown his thoughts, he ordered a bottle of champagne, and drank it all, then two glasses of kümmel after his coffee; then, as he was almost fasting, having eaten nothing before leaving except a little cold meat and bread, he soon felt himself invaded by a sensation of intense giddiness which he took for forgetfulness. His sad thoughts, his grief, his anguish seemed drowned in the wine, which had in that short time transformed his tortured heart into an almost callous one. He went back to Montigny and went to bed at once. But he awoke when it was pitch dark, ill at ease, and worried as if a nightmare, chased away some hours ago, had reappeared furtively to disturb his sleep. Mme. de Burne was there, walking round his bed, with the Comte de Bernhaus.

"Aha!" said he. "I am jealous now; how is that?"

Why was he jealous? He very soon knew why. While he was her lover he knew, in spite of his fears and his torture, that she was true to him; wanting in warmth, in tenderness, but resolutely faithful. Now he had broken away from her, he had given her her liberty—all was over. Would she remain now without a lover? For some time, no doubt, and then? That very fidelity that had attached her to him until now, had it not had its source in the vague presentiment that if she left him, Mariolle, through weariness, she would be forced after a certain time, longer or shorter, to replace him, not through passion, but because she was tired of solitude, just as she would have sent him away, being tired of him? Do not some women keep their lovers on indefinitely, with resignation, simply through fear of their successor? Besides, to change her lover would not have seemed correct to a woman like her, too intelligent to be swayed by prejudice, but endowed with a delicate moral sense which would protect her from real pollution. Philosophical society woman, not middle-class prude, she did not shrink from a secret attachment, but her fastidious nature would have recoiled with disgust from a succession of lovers.

He had set her at liberty—and now? Now she would certainly take another lover, and it would be the Comte de Bernhaus. Mariolle felt certain of it, and he suffered indescribably. Why had he broken off with her? He had left her, knowing her to be faithful, friendly and charming. Why? Because he was a sensual brute, knowing nothing of love except its physical transports.

Was this really so? Yes; but there was something else besides—there was the fear of suffering. He had fled before

the grief of not being loved as he loved; before the cruel divergence that had arisen between them, the unequal tenderness of their kisses, the incurable pain in his heart. He had dreaded the continuance for years of that anguish that had lasted for several weeks seeming like months. Weak in this, as in everything else, he had shrunk from pain, just as he had all his life shrunk from any great effort. He was incapable of carrying anything to its conclusion, as incapable of immersing himself in passion as he would have been of immersing himself in work, if he had attempted to follow any art or science.

Until day dawned he was a prey to this self-analysis, which worried him like a pack of wolves; then he got up and went down to the riverside. A fisherman was casting his net near the weir. The water whirled round in the light, and when the man drew out his net, to spread it on the broad end of his boat, the little fish glittered through the meshes like quicksilver. Mariolle grew calmer in the morning air, in the steam rising from the waterfall in which danced little rainbows; the current flowing past him seemed to be carrying away some of his grief in its incessant and rapid flow. He said: "Truly I did right. I should have been too wretched."

Returning then to the house, he took a hammock he had noticed in the porch, and, bringing it down to the terrace, hung it between the yews. Throwing himself into it, he tried to think of nothing and watch the water flow by. Breakfast time found him in a sweet torpor, enjoying a physical well-being that communicated itself to his soul, and he lingered over the meal as long as possible to kill time. One expectation worried him—the coming of the mail. He had telegraphed to Paris and written to Fontainebleau, to order his mail to be sent on. Nothing, so far, had come and a feeling of forlornness began to oppress him. But why should it? He could not expect anything agreeable, consolatory, reassuring in the little black box hanging at the postman's side, nothing but useless invitations and banal communications. Therefore why desire these papers as if the salvation of his soul depended on them? Was it possible that he cherished at the bottom of his soul the vain hope that she would write to him? He asked one of the old servant women:

"At what time does the mail come?"

"At noon, monsieur."

Noon was just at hand. He began to listen to the noises outside with great anxiety. A knock soon sounded on the front door. But the postman only brought some newspapers and three unimportant letters. Mariolle read and reread the papers, grew bored and went out. What would he do? He went toward the hammock and again stretched himself in it. At the end of half an hour an imperious wish to move about took possession of him. Where would he go? To the forest? Yes, the forest was delicious, but the solitude there was even more insistent than here in the house, for there were always noises in the village, and that loneliness, that silence of trees and leaves, filled him with sadness and regret, plunged him into wretchedness. In his revery he went over his long walk of the day before, and when he thought of the little waitress at the Hôtel Corot he said to himself:

"I'll go there and have dinner?"

The idea seemed to cheer him; it would be something to do, would make several hours pass, and he started out at once. The long village street stretched straight out into the valley between two rows of low, white houses, roofed with tiles, some built in a straight line along the road, others at the end of little yards in which lilac trees flourished, hens scratched in manure heaps, and outside staircases with wooden railings led to doors in the walls. Peasants were slowly working about their houses at different forms of work. He noticed a bent old woman with hair grizzled and yellowish, in spite of her age, for rustics seldom have white hair, dressed in a torn old waist and a scanty woollen skirt that revealed the outline of her thin and bony legs. She looked straight in front of her with eyes that held no spark of intelligence, eyes that had never beheld anything except the few simple objects necessary to her sordid existence. A younger woman was hanging out clothes before her door. The movements of her arms, raising her skirt, showed thick, heavy ankles, and above them bones, large, skinny legs in blue stockings, while her waist and chest, flat and wide as those of a man, revealed a shapeless form repulsive to look upon.

Mariolle said to himself: "Women! Those are women!" The silhouette of Mme. de Burne rose before his eyes. He recalled her, superb in elegance and beauty, a gem of humanity, coquettish and adorned for the eyes of men, and he quivered with the anguish of an irreparable loss. He walked on quickly to try to throw off these thoughts, and when he got to the Hôtel Corot the little maid knew him immediately and said almost familiarly:

"Bonjour, monsieur!"

"Bonjour, mademoiselle!"

"Do you wish something to drink?"

"Yes, to begin with; then I shall take dinner here."

They decided first what he should drink; then what he should eat. He consulted her, so as to make her talk, for she spoke prettily with the crisp Parisian accent and an ease of enunciation as noticeable as her ease of motion. He thought as he listened:

"She is quite pleasing, this young girl. She has the making of a cocotte in her, to my mind." He asked her:

"You are a Parisian?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Have you been here long?"

"A fortnight."

"Do you like it?"

"Not yet, but it is too soon to tell. I am tired of the air of the city and the country is doing me good. That is what decided me to come here. Shall I bring you a glass of vermouth, monsieur?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, and please tell the chef or the cook to look well after my dinner."

"Do not fear, monsieur."

She went out, leaving him alone. He went to a seat near a table in an arbor, where his vermouth was brought to him. He stayed there till the end of the day listening to a thrush in a cage and looking at times at the little maid, who coquetted with him, putting her best foot foremost for this gentleman, who evidently admired her. He went away, as the night before, with a bottle of champagne warming his heart; but the darkness of the way and the coolness of the night soon dissipated this effect and a deep depression entered his soul.

He thought: "What shall I do? Shall I stay here? Am I fated to drag out this wretched existence much longer?" and it was late before he slept.

The next day he was swinging in his hammock, and the sight of the fisherman suggested to him to go fishing. A grocer where he bought a line gave him some instructions on the gentle sport, and offered to guide his first efforts. The proposition was accepted, and from nine to twelve by dint of strict attention and great zeal he succeeded in capturing three small fish.

After his midday meal he set out again for Marlotte. What for? To kill time. The little maid at the hotel began to smile as soon as she caught sight of him. He smiled at her in return, grateful for the recognition, and he tried to get her to talk. More familiar than on the previous day, she chatted with him and told him her name was Elisabeth Ledru. Her mother, a dressmaker, had died the year before; then her father had disappeared. He was a drunkard and had lived for years on the labor of his wife and daughter, and he knew that the girl could not maintain two persons out of her unassisted earnings.

Tired of leading a solitary life, she went to wait in a restaurant, remaining there about a year; then, as she felt tired of the city, she accepted the offer of the founder of the Hôtel Corot to go and wait at table there, with two other young girls who were to arrive later.

This story pleased Mariolle, who, by questioning the girl with skill and treating her like a young lady, learned all about the poor and dark home ruined by the dissolute father. She, a waif without ties, but gay notwithstanding by reason of her youth, feeling the interest taken in her by this stranger to be genuine, spoke to him with confidence and with an expansion that she could no more control than she could the free motions of her body. He said to her when she had finished:

"And so you wish to be a waitress all your life?"

"I don't know, monsieur. How can I tell what may occur to-morrow?"

"Still it is always best to think of the future."

She looked thoughtful for a moment. Then her face cleared and she said:

"I shall take whatever comes my way!"

They parted good friends. He returned there a few days later, then again, then often, vaguely attracted by the naïve chatter of this girl, which dissipated his gloom to some extent. But when he got back at night to Montigny he had terrible attacks of melancholy. Always with the coming of dawn his heart lightened a little, but as soon as night fell again the fierce jealousy and heartrending regrets would settle on his soul again like evil birds. No news had arrived. He had written to no one and no one had written to him. He knew nothing. So he constantly dwelt on the liaison which he had foreseen would exist between his former mistress and the Comte de Bernhaus. This idea grew more fixed daily. The comte would give her exactly what she wanted: a distingué, assiduous lover, unexacting, satisfied and flattered at being the preferred one of the witty and delicious enchantress. He compared the comte to himself. Bernhaus doubtless would never have those nervous attacks, those fits of impatience, that intense desire for affection that had broken off their liaison.

He would be content with very little, being a tactful, discreet man of the world, not manifesting any tendency to strong feeling.

One day in arriving at the Hôtel Corot Mariolle saw in one of the arbors two young men, sitting smoking. The proprietor, a stout man with a broad face, came forward to meet him, for he felt a friendly interest in this faithful customer. He said:

"I have had two new guests come since yesterday, artists."

"Those two gentlemen?"

"Yes. They have already become acquainted. The short one got his second medal last year."

Having communicated all he knew about the artists in embryo, he asked:

"What will you take to-day, monsieur?"

"Send me a vermouth as usual."

Elisabeth soon appeared carrying a tray, with glasses, a decanter and a bottle. When the artists saw her they called out:

"Well, little girl, are you angry still?"

She did not answer, and, when she drew near, Mariolle saw that her eyes were red.

"You have been crying?" he asked.

"Yes, a little," she answered simply.

"What has happened?"

"Those two gentlemen over there behaved badly to me."

"What did they do?"

"They took me for—something which I am not."

"Did you complain to the proprietor?"

She gave an expressive shrug of the shoulders:

"Oh, monsieur! The proprietor! I know him now—the proprietor!"

Mariolle, touched a little and a little irritated, said:

"Tell me all about it."

She described the brutal behavior of the two blackguards toward her immediately on their arrival. Then she began to cry, saying what would she do without money, friends or resources in this strange place.

"Will you enter my service?" Mariolle proposed suddenly. "You will be well treated in my house, and when I return to Paris you can do what you please."

She looked at him attentively with questioning eyes, then answered all at once:

"I am willing, monsieur."

"What wages do you get here?"

"Sixty francs a month." She added anxiously: "And then I get tips here, too, you know, which brings it up to about seventy."

"I will give you a hundred."

"A hundred francs a month?" she repeated, surprised.

"Yes. Won't that suit you?"

"I should rather think it would!"

"You will only have to wait on me, take care of my clothes and look after my room."

"Very well, monsieur."

"When will you come?"

"To-morrow, if you like. After what has occurred, I shall go to the mayor and oblige the proprietor to let me go."

Mariolle took two louis from his pocket and gave them to her:

"This is for good luck," he said.

A flash of joy illumined her face and she said decidedly:

"I shall be at your house to-morrow, before twelve o'clock, monsieur."

CHAPTER XII

HALF CONSOLED

Elisabeth arrived the next day at Montigny, followed by a countryman carrying her trunk in a wheelbarrow. Mariolle had discharged one of his old women with a handsome present in money to console her, and the new maid took possession of a little room next to the cook's on the second floor. When she presented herself to the master of the house her manner was rather different from what it had been at the Hôtel Corot, less expansive, humbler, since she had become the servant of the gentleman whose humble friend she had been at the Hôtel Corot. He told her in a few words what her duties would be, and she listened attentively and settled down to her work. A week went by without the soul of Mariolle experiencing any change. All he noticed was that he left his home more rarely now, since he had no excuse for walking to Marlotte and that he felt less sad than before. The great passion of his grief subsided, as all transports of this nature must subside; but instead of the turbulence a deep depression of spirits began to possess him, one of those profound states of dejection that resemble a slow and chronic disease that often proves fatal. All his former activity, the interest that he took in the things that had heretofore busied and amused him, died away and was succeeded by a disgust and an apathy which seemed to deprive him of even the strength necessary to go out and take a walk. His greatest distraction now was to lie in his hammock and look at the Loing flowing by and to watch the fisherman cast his net.

After her first days of shyness and reserve Elisabeth grew bolder a little, and, remarking with her feminine instinct the constant depression of her master, she said one day:

"Monsieur is feeling lonely?"

"Yes, very lonely," he answered resignedly.

"Monsieur should go and take a walk."

"It would not do me any good."

She lavished little secret attentions upon him. Every morning when he entered his parlor he found it full of flowers and fragrant as a hothouse. Elisabeth must have bribed the boys of the village, for they brought her from the forest primroses and violets, and she also got contributions from the gardens in the village. Even though sunk in melancholy, Mariolle could not help noticing this, and felt pleased at the evidence of gratitude evinced by these many little, thoughtful cares.

He thought also that she was growing prettier, more dainty in her dress, that her face had grown paler, and, in consequence, more refined. He observed one day when she was giving him a cup of tea that her hands were no longer those of a maid but those of a lady, the nails carefully trimmed and irreproachably clean. Another time he noticed that her shoes were almost elegant. One afternoon she went upstairs and came down again, soon after, in a charming little gray dress of perfect taste. He cried on seeing her:

"Why, how coquettish you look, Elisabeth!"

She blushed to the roots of her hair and stammered:

"I? Oh, no, monsieur! I am dressing a little better because I have more money."

"When did you buy that dress?"

"I made it myself, monsieur."

"You made it yourself? Why, I always see you working about the house all day long!"

"In the evening, sir."

"But where did you get the material? And who cut it out for you?"

She answered that the shopkeeper at Montigny had brought her some samples from Fontainebleau; she had chosen one and paid for the stuff with the two louis that Mariolle had given her. As far as the cutting and making were concerned, that was the easiest part, as she and her mother had worked for a magasin de confections for years.

He could not help saying:

"It is very becoming to you; you look very nice."

She crimsoned to her eyes. When she had left him he said to himself: "I wonder if she is falling in love with me."

He thought over it, hesitated, doubted, then finished by convincing himself that it was, after all, very possible. He had been kind, helpful and compassionate and almost a friend to her. What was there surprising in this young girl's falling in love with her master, after all he had done for her? The idea, moreover, was not an unpleasant one to dwell upon, the young girl being so very nice, with nothing suggesting a servant in her. His masculine vanity, wounded and crushed by another woman, began to be flattered, soothed, almost comforted.

It was a compensation, a very slight one it was true, almost imperceptible, but it was a compensation, for, after all, if love comes to any one, no matter who tenders it, it proves that the receiver is capable of inspiring the sentiment. His unconscious egotism was soothed by this. It would occupy his mind, perhaps healthfully, to watch this little heart awakening and commencing to throb for him. It never occurred to him to send the child away, in order to preserve her from the risk of undergoing what had caused his suffering: to have more pity upon her than had been felt for him; compassion seldom accompanies a sentimental triumph.

So he watched her and soon discovered that he was not mistaken, and every day confirmed his opinion. As she brushed against him one morning in waiting on table, he noticed in her clothing a smell of perfume, common perfume, furnished, no doubt, by the local shopkeeper. Then he gave her a bottle of toilet water of a kind that he himself used and always kept a quantity of on hand when away from home; also some cakes of good soap and some dentifrice and rice powder. He thus aided the transformation that became every day more apparent and more complete, noted by him with a watchful and flattered eye. While still scrupulously attentive to her duties and prudent in her conduct, she gradually became éprise, her feminine instinct for captivating developing naïvely. On his part, he was growing by degrees to entertain an attachment for her. He was amused, touched and gratified. He toyed with this budding affection just as one toys with anything that can while away sad

hours, but he experienced for her only that vague feeling that impels a man toward any attractive woman, be she a pretty maid-servant or a handsome peasant, a rustic Venus. What most attracted him in her was her femininity: he longed for that with a confused and irresistible longing, proceeding from his connection with that other woman who had aroused in him that invincible, mysterious quality in a man's nature, the imperious need of the presence, the contact of a woman, that aroma, subtle, ideal or sensual, that is an attribute of every alluring woman, wherever found, be she of the lower orders or of the élite of society, Oriental maid with languorous black eyes or northern siren with eyes of azure—the immemorial attraction of the feminine.

This tender, watchful, incessant attention, more perceptible than visible, seemed to swathe his wounds in a sort of protecting medium that rendered them less sensitive to the recurring attacks of anguish. But the wounds were there, hovering about him like flies around a wound. Since he had forbidden his address to be given, his friends had respected his desire for seclusion, and he was above all tortured by absence of news. From time to time he read in the papers the name of Lamarthe or Massival in the lists of people who had been present at a grand dinner or assisted at some fête. One day he saw a notice of Mme. de Burne appearing as one of the prettiest, most elegant and most superbly dressed of the guests at a ball at the Austrian Embassy. He shivered from head to foot. A little further down the list appeared the name of Comte de Bernhaus; until evening a frantic jealousy lacerated the heart of Mariolle. The suspected liaison was now placed beyond a doubt in his mind. It was one of those worrying, imaginary conclusions that are more harassing than certainties, for one never rids one's self of them. Able no longer to endure the suspense, he decided to write to Lamarthe, who, knowing him well enough to guess at the misery of his soul, might perhaps enlighten him without being definitely questioned.

One evening, therefore, by candlelight, he composed a letter to him, a long one, cleverly expressed, vaguely sad, full of veiled interrogations and poetical utterances on the beauty of the country in spring. Four days after, on receiving his mail, he recognized at a glance the firm, upright handwriting of the novelist. Lamarthe sent him many details that added to his uneasiness. He spoke of a great many people, and without particularly mentioning Mme. de Burne and the Comte de Bernhaus, he put the two in focus, as it were, by one of those tricks of style peculiar to him, revealing much, yet not betraying that he did so. As a result, the letter confirmed all Mariolle's suspicions: his fears would soon be realized if they were not already so. The life of his old sweetheart was always the same—brilliant, exciting, worldly. He had been missed a little after his disappearance, after the fashion of those who pass away from sight; a little indifferent curiosity was evinced, and he was believed to be in far distant lands, having left Paris because he was weary of it.

After having received this letter he stayed till night, stretched in his hammock. He did not dine; he could not sleep. The next morning he felt so tired, so discouraged, so weary of the mon-

otonous days spent between the dark, mysterious forest and the noisy little river that he stayed in bed.

When Elisabeth came at the sound of his bell and found him still in bed, she stopped still in the doorway and turned very pale. Then she said:

"Monsieur is ill?"

"Yes, a little."

"Shall I send for the doctor?"

"No, I am subject to these attacks."

"What can I do for monsieur?"

He ordered his daily bath, eggs for his breakfast and tea. But toward one o'clock he was seized with such a violent sensation of ennui that he thought he must get up. Elisabeth, ceaselessly summoned by a whim of the sham invalid, anxious, distressed, wishful to be of use and to suggest something that would do him good, seeing him nervous and restless, offered to read to him, blushing rosy red at her own audacity.

"Can you read well?" he asked.

"Yes, monsieur. At school I always got prizes every year for reading, and I read many novels through to maman —I can remember only their names now."

He felt curious to see, so he sent her to the atelier to fetch his favorite—"Manon Lescaut." She helped him to sit up in bed, put two pillows behind his back, took a chair and began. She read well, being endowed with a gift of clear enunciation and intelligent expression. The story interested her from the beginning, and she showed so much feeling as she read it that he made her stop often to talk to her and question her.

Through the open window came the noise of the rushing water mingled with the song of the nightingales and the odors of flowers and trees. André looked at the young girl, whose sparkling eyes followed the story from page to page. She answered his questions with a comprehension of tenderness and passion—a just comprehension but one modified by her ignorance. He thought to himself: "She would become very witty and intelligent, this little girl, if she were educated."

The feminine charm noticed in her already by him was beneficial to him this warm and quiet afternoon and mingled itself in his mind with the mysterious and powerful charm of that Manon who arouses in our hearts the most peculiar image of any woman created by the human imagination.

He was lulled by her voice, entranced by that well-known but ever new story, and he dreamed of a mistress, capricious and captivating like De Grieux's, unfaithful yet constant, human and tempting even in the midst of her terrible faults, created to evoke in a man all that he was capable of feeling—tenderness and rage, love and passionate hatred, jealousy and desire.

Ah! if she whom he had left had only felt within herself the voluptuous and perfidious love of that passion-provoking courtesan, perhaps he never would have left her! Manon deceived her lover, but she loved him; she lied to him, but she gave herself to him.

CHAPTER XIII

A RECALL

When she appeared before him next morning as she brought in the tea, and their eyes met, she began to tremble so violently that the cup and saucer and sugar bowl knocked together several times. Mariolle went toward her, took the tray out of her hands, putting it on the table, and said to her as she lowered her eyelids:

"Look at me, petite."

She looked up at him, her lashes wet with tears.

"I don't want you to cry," he said. As he clasped her to him to felt her shiver from head to foot, murmuring: "Oh, mon Dieu!" He saw that it was not sorrow, regret or remorse that made her utter these words, but happiness, pure happiness. He experienced a strange content, physical rather than moral, in feeling nestling on his bosom this little person who truly loved him. He thanked her for her love just as a wounded beggar at the roadside would thank a woman who gave him alms. He thanked her with all that heart famished by the indifference of another woman and lacerated by its futile throbbings.

"Sit down," he said to her.

She sat down. He took her hands, her poor working-girl's hands, now become white and delicate so as to please him, and very gently and with tact he spoke of the attitude they were to henceforth assume toward each other. She was no longer his servant, but would have to retain the appearance of being so, in order to avoid scandal. She would live in the house with him as a housekeeper and would read a great deal to him—this occupation would furnish an excuse for her new position. In a short time, when she was fully established as his reader, she would eat at his table.

When he had finished she answered him simply:

"No, monsieur, I am, and I shall continue to be, your servant. I don't want any gossip to arise, and I am anxious that what has passed shall remain unknown."

She would not yield the point, although he insisted a good deal, and when he had drunk his tea she carried away the tray, followed by his tender glance. When she had gone he thought:

"This is a woman; all women are equal when they please us. I have made my servant my mistress. Already pretty, she may become charming: anyhow, she is younger and fresher than society women and cocottes. What does it matter after all? Are not many celebrated actresses the daughters of concierges? Yet they are received as ladies, adored as if they were heroines of romance, and princes treat them like sovereigns. Is it on account of their talent, which is in many cases doubtful, or their beauty, very often open to question? No. But a woman takes always the position she is able to command for herself by the illusion she produces."

That day he took a long walk, and, although the same pain gnawed constantly at his heart and his legs were heavy as if grief had destroyed all the springs of his energy, there was existent

in him a cheerfulness like the singing of a little bird. He felt less alone, less lost and deserted. The forest appeared less vast, lonely and silent, and he returned at night looking forward to seeing her smiling, her eyes full of tenderness at his entrance.

Then he would go and lie in the hammock, and Elisabeth, sitting on a folding chair, would read to him. Even while listening to and looking at her, he would recall the evenings spent alone in the salon with Mme. de Burne, chatting with her. Then an overwhelming desire to weep would beset him; his eyelids would become wet, and so intense a regret would tug at his heart that he felt as if he must depart immediately to return to Paris or go away forever.

Seeing him gloomy and depressed, Elisabeth asked him:

"Are you in pain? I feel that you have tears in your eyes."

"Kiss me, little one; you would not understand."

She kissed him, feeling uneasy, suspecting some story that she had not heard; and he, soothed by her caresses a little, thought: "Ah! what a woman would be created in the combination of these two, uniting the affection of the one with the charm of the other. How is it that one never finds the realization of one's ideal—never attains higher than the 'almost'?" He mused vaguely, lulled by the monotonous sound of her voice, to which he was not listening, thinking of all that had allured and vanquished him in the mistress he had forsaken. He said to himself, under the obsession of her memory, of her imaginary presence by which he was haunted as men beset by visions are by phantoms: "Am I fated never to be delivered from her?"

He began again to take long walks, to wander about the thicket, with the vague hope of losing her somewhere, at the bottom of a ravine, behind a rock, in some thicket, like a man who, in order to rid himself of some unfortunate dog which he is reluctant to kill, will try to lose him on a journey.

One day in one of these walks he returned by the country of the beeches. By this time it was a gloomy forest, almost dark with the impenetrable foliage. He walked under the immense vault, formed by the overarching branches, regretting the scanty verdure of the spring, so penetrated by the golden sunbeams sifting through, and, as he turned into a narrow path, he stopped, struck with astonishment, before two trees entangled in each other's embrace. No more vivid symbol of his love had ever met his eyes: a beautiful and vigorous beech strangling a tall oak tree.

Like a desperate lover with a powerful but tortured body the beech threw two formidable arms around the trunk of the oak, closing them around it. The other, held in this embrace, raised high in the heavens its proud head, as if in disdain. But, in spite of this flight toward space, this haughty aloofness, it bore in its trunk two great, deep scars that had long ago cicatrized. The branches beneath the scars had become an integral part of the tree, and the two, oak and beech, united forever, mingled their sap, and in the veins of the outraged tree it mounted to the great high top in the waving leaves.

Mariolle sat down so as to look at them for a long time. The sight of

these trees appeared to his morbid soul a true symbol of his love—these two wrestlers motionless in the heart of the forest.

Then he got up and set off sadder than ever. Suddenly, as he went along, his eyes bent on the ground, he saw hidden in the grass, dirty with mud and the rain of weeks ago, a telegram lost or thrown away by some passerby. He stopped. What sweet or painful message had the rumpled blue paper carried to some heart?

He could not help picking it up; with curious hands he unfolded it. It was almost illegible, but he made out this much of the writing: "Come . . . at four . . . me . . ." The names had been effaced by the wet.

Recollections both cruel and delicious arose to his mind, of all the despatches he had received from her—now to appoint the time of the rendezvous—now to tell him that she could not come. Never had any object raised such emotion in his heart, made him tremble so violently, made his poor heart stop and bound again like the sight of these blissful or desolating despatches. He felt almost prostrated with woe at the idea that never again would he receive one from her. Again he asked himself what could have happened to her since he left her. Had she suffered, regretted the friend driven away by her indifference, or was she simply wounded in her vanity? His desire to find out became so violent, so insistent that an audacious idea came to him. He went to Fontainebleau and found out the telegraph office. His soul was shaken by vacillation and anxiety, but a force seemed to be dominating him—an irresistible force emanating from his heart.

He took with a trembling hand a telegraph form from the table, and, after putting the name and address of Mme. de Burne, wrote the following message:

I want so much to know what you are thinking of me. I can forget nothing.

ANDRÉ MARIOLLE.

Montigny.

He went out afterward, took a carriage and went back to Montigny, troubled and tormented at what he had done, regretting it already.

He had calculated that if she vouchsafed an answer he would get a letter in two days, but did not leave his cottage till the next day, fearing that a despatch might come. He was swinging in the hammock between the yews at about three the next afternoon when Elisabeth came to tell him that a lady wished to speak to him.

The shock was so great that he felt a short sensation of choking, and he went toward the house, his legs shaking and his heart palpitating. He did not think, however, that it could be she. When he had opened the door of the salon, Mme. de Burne, seated on a sofa, rose and, smiling a rather reserved smile, a slight constraint visible in her face and attitude, held out her hand to him, saying:

"I have come to get some news of you, the telegram not having given complete details."

He had grown so pale at seeing her that her eyes shone with joy at perceiving it; and he remained so oppressed with emotion that he could not speak for some time and could only hold to

his lips the hand she held out to him.

"Dieu! how good you are!" said he at last.

"No, but I do not forget my friends, and I worry about them."

She looked him full in the face with that first glance of a woman that takes all in, penetrates every thought to its source and brushes away all disguises. She was no doubt satisfied, for her face cleared and she smiled.

"Your hermitage is pretty," she said. "Are you happy here?"

"No, madame."

"Is it possible! In this pretty country near the lovely forest and on the bank of this charming little river! You ought to be quiet and absolutely happy here."

"No, madame."

"Why not?"

"Because one does not forget."

"Is it indispensable that you should forget something so as to be happy?"

"Yes, madame."

"May I ask what?"

"You know."

"And what then?"

"I am perfectly miserable."

"I guessed that when I received your telegram," she answered, "and that is why I came; with the determination to go away at once if I were mistaken." After a short pause she added: "Since I am not returning immediately, may I go over your place? There is a little path between the lime-trees there that looks very delightful—it must be cooler there than in the salon."

They went out. She wore a mauve toilet that harmonized so exquisitely with the verdure of the trees and the blueness of the sky that she bewildered him as much as would an apparition; looking so pretty in a new and alluring manner. Her long, supple waist, her delicate and fresh face, the blond fire of her hair, under a large mauve hat that formed a nimbus with a long ostrich plume surrounding it, her thin arms with the two hands crossed in front carrying her closed umbrella, and her bearing, rather upright and proud, brought into this little rustic garden something abnormal, exotic, unexpected, the bizarre suggestion of some figure out of a story, a dream, a Watteau picture; a creation evolved from the brain of a poet or a painter who had taken an excursion into the country to show, at the bidding of a sudden caprice, how beautiful she was. Mariolle, in looking at her, quivering with all his revived passion, recalled the two peasant women he had seen when he was walking through Montigny. She asked him: "Who is that young person who opened the door to me?"

"My servant."

"She does not look like a servant."

"No. She is extremely nice."

"Where did you get her?"

"Quite near here, in a hotel frequented by artists."

"You made a good selection."

"To my own advantage, certainly, for I much prefer seeing a pretty face to an ugly one around me."

"That is the only feeling with which she has inspired you?"

"She perhaps inspired me with an irresistible desire to see you again, for any woman who attracts my eyes, if only for a second, sends my thoughts back to you."

"That is a very skillful way of getting out of it. Does she love her preserver?"

He reddened still more painfully. Like

a flash the idea came to him that jealousy is a good stimulant for the heart, and he determined to utter only a half lie. So he replied hesitatingly:

"I don't know anything about that. It is possible. She is very attentive to me and looks after me well."

An imperceptible annoyance impelled Mme. de Burne to murmur:

"And you?"

He fixed his eyes, burning with love, on her, and answered:

"Nothing could tempt me from you."

This was again very skillful, but she no longer thought of that. His utterance seemed to her the expression of an indubitable truth. How could a woman like her doubt such an avowal? She certainly did not doubt it, and, satisfied, she worried herself no more about Elisabeth.

They seated themselves on two folding chairs in the shadow of the lime-trees, above the flowing water.

"What could you have thought of me?" he asked.

"That you were very unhappy."

"Through my fault or yours?"

"Through our fault. Then, knowing you to be very excitable, very intense, it struck me that the most sensible thing to do would be to let you come to yourself. And so I waited."

"What were you waiting for?"

"A word from you. I received it, and here I am. Now let us talk like sensible people. So you still love me? I do not ask you this is as a coquette, but in the character of a friend."

"I love you still."

"And what are your intentions?"

"I do not know. I am in your hands."

"Oh, I—I have very definite ideas, but I shall not impart them until I know yours. Let us speak of you, of what took place in your heart and in your mind since you went away."

"I thought of you and did scarcely anything else."

"Yes, but how, in what way and with what result?"

He related his determination to be cured of his love for her, his flight, his arrival in the great forest where he saw nothing around him but her; told of his days haunted by memories, his nights made wretched by jealousy. He told all in good faith, except the love of Elisabeth, whose name was not mentioned.

Mme. de Burne listened, convinced of the truth of all he said, more certain of it through the belief she entertained in the power she wielded over Mariolle than assured by the sincerity of his voice and manner. She was overjoyed at her triumph at receiving him back, for she really was sincerely fond of him.

Then he lamented anew this hopeless situation, and growing excited in speaking about what he had undergone, he reproached her with impassioned, poetic enthusiasm, but with no rancor or bitterness for the incapacity for love with which she was cursed.

"Some are denied the gift of pleasing," he said in ending. "To you the gift of loving is denied."

She interrupted him animatedly, full of reasons and argument.

"At least I have the gift of constancy," she broke in. "Would you be less unhappy if after having loved you for ten months I were to-day in love with another?"

"Is it impossible for a woman to love only one man?"

"One cannot love at will; one can always be faithful," she answered quickly. "Do you imagine that the delirious exaltation of the senses can last for several years? With the majority of women, passionate women, who takes caprices lasting a longer or a shorter time, life is nothing but a long romance; the heroes, the circumstances, the dénoûments change; it is an amusement and a distraction for them, I must confess, for the emotions of the beginning, middle and end are changed each time. But when it is finished it is finished—for the man. You understand?"

"Yes, that is true, to some extent. But I do not see your drift."

"It is this. No great, burning, torturing passion can exist for a long time—like yours from which you suffer. It is a phase which I have made very painful to you, I know and feel it, through my lack of tenderness and my incapability of expansion. But this phase of feeling you are undergoing will pass—it cannot last eternally."

She stopped. He asked anxiously:

"And then?"

"Then I consider that for a calm and reasonable woman like me you will make a very agreeable lover, for you have plenty of tact. But you would be an atrocious husband. However, there are not, there cannot be, any good husbands."

He asked, surprised, a little vexed:

"Why keep a lover whom you no longer care for or never really loved?"

"I do love in my own fashion, mon ami," she answered. "I love calmly, but I love."

"You have, above all," he replied resignedly, "the desire that one should love you and that he should show that he loves you."

"That's true," she answered. "I adore that. But my heart needs a secret companion. That vain love of public homage does not prevent me from being faithful and devoted and believing that I am capable of bestowing upon a man something of myself that no other could have—my loyal affection, the secret attachment of my heart, the absolute and secret confidence of my soul; and, in return, receiving from him with all his lover-like tenderness the rare and sweet feeling that I am not alone. It is not, perhaps, love as you understand it; but it is worth something."

He bent toward her, trembling with feeling and stammering:

"Are you willing that I should be that man?"

"Yes, a little later, when you are suffering less. In the meantime be resigned to a little torture occasionally through your companionship with me. That will pass over. Since you experience pain in any case, it is better to feel it near me than far away, is it not?"

Her smile seemed to say: "Do have a little confidence in me," and as she saw him vibrating with passion, she felt throughout her being a sort of contentment that made her happy after her own fashion, just as a hunter is happy when a long-desired prey is struggling in the trap he set.

"When do you return?" she asked.

"Why, to-morrow," he answered.

"All right—to-morrow let it be. Will you take dinner with me?"

"Yes, madame."

"I must go soon," she remarked, looking at the watch set in the handle of her umbrella.

"Oh! Why so soon?"

"Because I must catch the five o'clock train. Some people are coming to dinner: the Princess de Malten, Bernhaus, Lamarthe, Massival, Maltry and a new acquaintance, M. de Charlaine, the explorer, just back from upper Cambodia after a wonderful journey. He is the rage just now."

Mariolle experienced a sudden pang at his heart. All the names she had mentioned, one after the other, hurt him like the stings of a wasp. They contained poison.

"Then," said he, "shall we start at once and take a drive through the forest?"

"That will be very nice. But won't you offer me first a cup of tea and some toast?"

When it was time to serve the tea Elisabeth could not be found.

"She has gone out to take a walk," the cook said.

Mme. de Burne was not surprised at this. What fear, anyhow, could this maid servant inspire in her now? They got into the landau waiting before the door, and Mariolle made the driver take a road which was longer, but which took in the Gorge-aux-Loups. As they drove along under the high foliage, enjoying its calm shade, breathing in its freshness, she said, struck by the inexpressible sensation with which the powerful and mysterious beauty of the earth influences the flesh through the eyes: "Dieu! How nice it is here! How beautiful and restful!"

She drew a long breath with the emotion of a shriven communicant, mingled with happiness, feeling penetrated with anguor and tender yearning. She placed her hand on that of André.

But he thought: "Ah! yes. Nature again! Just as at Mont St. Michel." For, before his eyes, in a vision, passed a train going to Paris. He took her to the station. On leaving him she said: "To-morrow, then, at eight."

"To-morrow at eight, madame."

Smiling radiantly, she left him, and he returned home in the landau, satisfied, happy, but always possessed by that haunting uneasiness, for the end was not yet.

But why struggle? It was of no use. She attracted him by a charm which he could not understand, stronger than any power he had ever encountered. To flee from her availed nothing; it only made him suffer intolerably, while, if he were patient and resigned, he would have from her at least all that she promised, for she did not lie.

The horses trotted under the trees, and he remembered that all through their interview she had never once had the idea, the impulse to tender him her lips. She was always the same; nothing would change her, and he would perhaps always suffer in the same manner through her. The recollection of the unhappy hours he had passed in the unbearable certainty that he could never touch her heart darkened his soul once more, made him dread and foresee similar misery in the future. However, he was determined to suffer all rather than to lose her again, resigned to that eternal longing that had become a sort of fierce appetite, never to be assuaged, a fire that consumed his flesh.

But when he got home and found that the young girl had not come back he felt anxious and said to the other servant:

"You are sure she went out?"

"Yes, monsieur."

He went out too, hoping that he might meet her. When he had gone a few steps, before turning into the long street that went along the valley, he saw an old church, wide and low, surmounted by a short steeple, squatting on a small eminence, and from this overlooking the village, like a hen watching over her chickens.

A suspicion, a presentiment, impelled him to enter. Who could fathom the strange suspicions that may arise in the heart of a woman? What had she heard? What had she understood? Where would she be more likely to go than to the church, if an inkling of the truth had penetrated her mind?

The interior of the church was very dark, for night was falling. Only the little lamp was visible at the end of its thread, revealing in the tabernacle the ideal presence of the Divine Consoler. Mariolle passed with light steps along the benches. When he drew near the choir he saw a woman kneeling, her face in her hands. There was no one else in the church. He approached, and seeing it was Elisabeth, touched her on the shoulder. She started violently and turned her head. Then he saw that she was crying.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"I understood," she answered. "You are here because she made you unhappy; and she came to fetch you."

He stammered, overcome by the sorrow that he now felt in his turn.

"You are mistaken, petite," he replied. "I am, it is true, returning to Paris, but I shall take you with me."

"Oh, no! It is not true! It is not true!" she cried, incredulous.

"I swear it to you," he said solemnly.

"When?"

"To-morrow."

Beginning to sob low, she moaned: "Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" He took her by the waist and led her out, made her go down the hill, now covered by night, and when they had reached the river bank he seated her on the grass and sat beside her. He listened to her heart beating and her breath catching, and, struck with remorse, straining her to him, he spoke tender words in her ear, such as he had never uttered to her before. Softened by pity and burning with desire, he scarcely departed from the truth and he did not deceive her. Astonished at what he felt, he asked himself how it was possible that, still thrilling from the presence of that other whose slave he must ever remain, he could thus tremble with passion and emotion in consoling this girl's grief.

"I love you so much. You are all I have in the world."

He answered, returning her caresses: "Dear little girl!"

Already she had almost forgotten the existence of that stranger whose appearance had that afternoon caused her such sharp grief. But a sort of half-conscious doubt floated in her mind, and she whispered in a coaxing voice:

"Truly you will always love me as you love me here?"

He answered firmly:

"I shall always love you as I love you here."

THE END

VOLUME III

UNE VIE

UNE VIE

CHAPTER I

THE HOME BY THE SEA

The weather was most distressing. It had rained all night. The roaring of the overflowing gutters filled the deserted streets, in which the houses, like sponges, absorbed the humidity, which penetrating to the interior, made the walls sweat from cellar to garret. Jeanne had left the convent the day before, free for all time, ready to seize all the joys of life, of which she had dreamed so long. She was afraid her father would not set out for the new home in bad weather, and for the hundredth time since daybreak she examined the horizon. Then she noticed that she had omitted to put her calendar in her travelling bag. She took from the wall the little card which bore in golden figures the date of the current year, 1819. Then she marked with a pencil the first four columns, drawing a line through the name of each saint up to the 2d of May, the day that she left the convent. A voice outside the door called "Jeannette." Jeanne replied, "Come in, papa." And her father entered. Baron Simon-Jacques Le Perthuis des Vauds was a gentleman of the last century, eccentric and good. An enthusiastic disciple of Jean Jacques Rousseau, he had the tenderness of a lover for nature, in the fields, in the woods and in the animals. Of aristocratic birth, he hated instinctively the year 1793, but being a philosopher by temperament and liberal by education, he execrated tyranny with an inoffensive and declamatory hatred. His great strength and his great weakness was his kind-heartedness, which had not arms enough to caress, to give, to embrace; the benevolence of a god, that gave freely, without questioning; in a word, a kindness of inertia that became almost a vice. A man of theory, he thought out a plan of education for his daughter, to the end that she might become happy, good, upright and gentle. She had lived at home until the age of twelve, when, despite the tears of her mother, she was placed in the Convent of the Sacred Heart. He had kept her severely secluded, cloistered, in ignorance of the secrets of life. He wished the Sisters to restore her to him pure at seventeen years of age, so that he might imbue her mind with a sort of rational poetry, and by means of the fields, in the midst of the fruitful earth, unfold her soul, enlighten her ignorance through the aspect of love in nature, through the simple tenderness of the animals, through the placid laws of existence. She was leaving the convent radiant, full of the joy of life, ready for all the happiness, all the charming incidents which her mind had pictured in her idle hours and in the long, quiet

nights. She was like a portrait by Veronese with her fair, glossy hair, which seemed to cast a radiance on her skin, a skin with the faintest tinge of pink, softened by a light velvety down which could be perceived when the sun kissed her cheek. Her eyes were an opaque blue, like those of Dutch porcelain figures. She had a tiny mole on her left nostril and another on the right of her chin. She was tall, well developed, with willowy figure. Her clear voice sounded at times a little too sharp, but her frank, sincere laugh spread joy around her. Often, with a familiar gesture, she would raise her hands to her temples as if to arrange her hair.

She ran to her father and embraced him warmly. "Well, are we going to start?" she said. He smiled, shook his head and said, pointing toward the window, "How can we travel in such weather?" But she implored in a cajoling and tender manner, "Oh, papa, do let us start. It will clear up in the afternoon." "But your mother will never consent to it." "Yes, I promise you that she will, I will arrange that." "If you succeed in persuading your mother, I am perfectly willing." In a few moments she returned from her mother's room, shouting in a voice that could be heard all through the house, "Papa, papa, mamma is willing. Have the horses harnessed." The rain was not abating; one might almost have said that it was raining harder when the carriage drove up to the door. Jeanne was ready to step in when the baroness came downstairs, supported on one side by her husband and on the other by a tall housemaid, strong and strapping as a boy. She was a Norman woman of the country of Caux, who looked at least twenty, although she was but eighteen at the most. She was treated by the family as a second daughter, for she was Jeanne's foster sister. Her name was Rosalie, and her chief duty lay in guiding the steps of her mistress, who had grown enormous in the last few years and also had an affection of the heart, which kept her complaining continually. The baroness, gasping from over-exertion, finally reached the doorstep of the old residence, looked at the court where the water was streaming and remarked: "It really is not wise." Her husband, always pleasant, replied: "It was you who desired it, Madame Adelaide." He always preceded her pompous name of Adelaide with the title madame with an air of half respectful mockery. Madame mounted with difficulty into the carriage, causing all the springs to bend. The baron sat beside her, while Jeanne and Rosalie were seated opposite, with their backs to the horses. Ludivine, the cook, brought a heap of wraps to put over their knees and two baskets, which were placed under the seats; then she climbed on the box beside Father Simon, wrapping herself in a great rug which covered her completely. The porter and his wife came to bid them good-by as they closed the carriage door, taking the last orders about the trunks, which were to follow in a wagon. So they started. Father Simon, the coachman, with head bowed and back bent in the pouring rain, was completely covered by his box coat with its triple cape. The howling storm beat upon the carriage windows and inundated the highway.

They drove rapidly to the wharf and continued alongside the line of tall-masted vessels until they reached the

boulevard of Mont Riboudet. Then they crossed the meadows, where from time to time a drowned willow, its branches drooping limply, could be faintly distinguished through the mist of rain. No one spoke. Their minds themselves seemed to be saturated with moisture like the earth.

The baroness leaned her head against the cushions and closed her eyes. The baron looked out with mournful eyes at the monotonous and drenched landscape. Rosalie, with a parcel on her knee, was dreaming in the dull reverie of a peasant. But Jeanne, under this downpour, felt herself revive like a plant that has been shut up and has just been restored to the air, and so great was her joy that, like foliage, it sheltered her heart from sadness. Although she did not speak, she longed to burst out singing, to reach out her hands to catch the rain that she might drink it. She enjoyed to the full being carried along rapidly by the horses, enjoyed gazing at the desolate landscape and feeling herself under shelter amid this general inundation. Beneath the pelting rain the gleaming backs of the two horses emitted a warm steam.

Little by little the baroness fell asleep, and presently began to snore sonorously. Her husband leaned over and placed in her hands a little leather pocketbook.

This awakened her, and she looked at the pocketbook with the stupid, sleepy look of one suddenly aroused. It fell off her lap and sprang open and gold and bank bills were scattered on the floor of the carriage. This roused her completely, and Jeanne gave vent to her mirth in a merry peal of girlish laughter.

The baron picked up the money and placed it on her knees. "This, my dear," he said, "is all that is left of my farm at Eletot. I have sold it—so as to be able to repair the 'Poplars,' where we shall often live in the future."

She counted six thousand four hundred francs and quietly put them in her pocket. This was the ninth of thirty-one farms that they had inherited which they had sold in this way. Nevertheless they still possessed about twenty thousand livres income annually in land rentals, which, with proper care, would have yielded about thirty thousand francs a year.

Living simply as they did, this income would have sufficed had there not been a bottomless hole always open in their house—kind-hearted generosity. It dried up the money in their hands as the sun dries the water in marshes. It flowed, fled, disappeared. How? No one knew. Frequently one would say to the other, "I don't know how it happens, but I have spent one hundred francs to-day, and I have bought nothing of any consequence." This faculty of giving was, however, one of the greatest pleasures of their life, and they all agreed on this point in a superb and touching manner.

Jeanne asked her father, "Is it beautiful now, my castle?" The baron replied, "You shall see, my little girl."

The storm began to abate. The vault of clouds seemed to rise and heighten and suddenly, through a rift, a long ray of sunshine fell upon the fields, and presently the clouds separated, showing the blue firmament, and then, like the tearing of a veil, the opening grew larger and the beautiful azure sky, clear and fathomless, spread over the world.

A fresh and gentle breeze passed over the earth like a happy sigh, and as they passed beside gardens or woods they heard occasionally the bright chirp of a bird as he dried his wings.

Evening was approaching. Everyone in the carriage was asleep except Jeanne. They stopped to rest and feed the horses. The sun had set. In the distance bells were heard. They passed a little village as the inhabitants were lighting their lamps, and the sky became also illuminated by myriads of stars. Suddenly they saw behind a hill, through the branches of the fir trees, the moon rising, red and full as if it were torpid with sleep.

The air was so soft that the windows were not closed. Jeanne, exhausted with dreams and happy visions, was now asleep. Finally they stopped. Some men and women were standing before the carriage door with lanterns in their hands. They had arrived. Jeanne, suddenly awakened, was the first to jump out. Her father and Rosalie had practically to carry the baroness, who was groaning and continually repeating in a weak little voice, "Oh, my God, my poor children!" She refused all offers of refreshment, but went to bed and immediately fell asleep. Jeanne and her father, the baron, took supper together. They were in perfect sympathy with each other. Later, seized with a childish joy, they started on a tour of inspection through the restored manor. It was one of those high and vast Norman residences that comprise both farmhouse and castle, built of white stone which had turned gray, large enough to contain a whole race of people.

An immense hall divided the house from front to rear and a staircase went up at either side of the entrance, meeting in a bridge on the first floor. The huge drawing-room was on the ground floor to the right and was hung with tapestries representing birds and foliage. All the furniture was covered with fine needlework tapestry illustrating La Fontaine's fables, and Jeanne was delighted at finding a chair she had loved as a child, which pictured the story of "The Fox and the Stork."

Beside the drawing-room were the library, full of old books, and two unused rooms; at the left was the dining-room, the laundry, the kitchen, etc.

A corridor divided the whole first floor, the doors of ten rooms opening into it. At the end, on the right, was Jeanne's room. She and her father went in. He had had it all newly done over, using the furniture and draperies that had been in the storeroom.

There were some very old Flemish tapestries, with their peculiar looking figures. At sight of her bed, the young girl uttered a scream of joy. Four large birds carved in oak, black from age and highly polished, bore up the bed and seemed to be its protectors. On the sides were carved two wide garlands of flowers and fruit, and four finely fluted columns, terminating in Corinthian capitals, supported a cornice of cupids with roses intertwined. The tester and the coverlet were of antique blue silk, embroidered in gold fleur de lys. When Jeanne had sufficiently admired it, she lifted up the candle to examine the tapestries and the allegories they represented. They were mostly conventional subjects, but the last hanging represented a drama. Near a rabbit, which was still nibbling, a young man lay stretched out, apparently dead. A young girl, gaz-

ing at him, was plunging a sword into her bosom, and the fruit of the tree had turned black. Jeanne gave up trying to divine the meaning underlying this picture, when she saw in the corner a tiny little animal which the rabbit, had he lived, could have swallowed like a blade of grass; and yet it was a lion. Then she recognized the story of "Pyramus and Thisbe," and though she smiled at the simplicity of the design, she felt happy to have in her room this love adventure which would continually speak to her of her cherished hopes, and every night this legendary love would hover about her dreams.

It struck eleven and the baron kissed Jeanne good-night and retired to his room. Before retiring, Jeanne cast a last glance round her room and then regretfully extinguished the candle. Through her window she could see the bright moonlight bathing the trees and the wonderful landscape. Presently she arose, opened a window and looked out. The night was so clear that one could see as plainly as by daylight. She looked across the park with its two long avenues of very tall poplars that gave its name to the château and separated it from the two farms that belonged to it, one occupied by the Couillard family, the other by the Martins. Beyond the enclosure stretched a long, uncultivated plain, thickly overgrown with rushes, where the breeze whistled day and night. The land ended abruptly in a steep white cliff three hundred feet high, with its base in the ocean waves.

Jeanne looked out over the long, undulating surface that seemed to slumber beneath the heavens. All the fragrance of the earth was in the night air. The odor of jasmine rose from the lower windows, and light whiffs of briny air and of seaweed were wafted from the ocean.

Merely to breathe was enough for Jeanne, and the restful calm of the country was like a soothing bath. She felt as though her heart was expanding and she began dreaming of love. What was it? She did not know. She only knew that she would adore *him* with all her soul and that he would cherish her with all his strength. They would walk hand in hand on nights like this, hearing the beating of their hearts, mingling their love with the sweet simplicity of the summer nights in such close communion of thought that by the sole power of their tenderness they would easily penetrate each other's most secret thoughts. This would continue forever in the calm of an enduring affection. It seemed to her that she felt *him* there beside her. And an unusual sensation came over her. She remained long musing thus, when suddenly she thought she heard a footstep behind the house. "If it were *he*." But it passed on and she felt as if she had been deceived. The air became cooler. The day broke. Slowly bursting aside the gleaming clouds, touching with fire the trees, the plains, the ocean, all the horizon, the great flaming orb of the sun appeared.

Jeanne felt herself becoming mad with happiness. A delirious joy, an infinite tenderness at the splendor of nature overcame her fluttering heart. It was *her* sun, *her* dawn! The beginning of *her* life! Thoroughly fatigued at last, she flung herself down and slept till her father called her at eight o'clock. He walked into the room and proposed to show her the improvements of the castle, of *her* castle. The road, called

the parish road, connecting the farms, joined the high road between Havre and Fécamp, a mile and a half further on.

Jeanne and the baron inspected everything and returned home for breakfast. When the meal was over, as the baroness had decided that she would rest, the baron proposed to Jeanne that they should go down to Yport. They started, and passing through the hamlet of Etouvent, where the poplars were, and going through the wooded slope by a winding valley leading down to the sea, they presently perceived the village of Yport. Women sat in their doorways mending linen; brown fish-nets were hanging against the doors of the huts, where an entire family lived in one room. It was a typical little French fishing village, with all its concomitant odors. To Jeanne it was all like a scene in a play. On turning a corner they saw before them the limitless blue ocean. They bought a brill from a fisherman and another sailor offered to take them out sailing, repeating his name, "Lastique, Joséphin Lastique," several times, that they might not forget it, and the baron promised to remember. They walked home, chattering like two children, carrying the big fish between them, Jeanne having pushed her father's walking cane through its gills.

CHAPTER II

HAPPY DAYS

A DELIGHTFUL life commenced for Jeanne, a life in the open air. She wandered along the roads, or into the little winding valleys, their sides covered with a fleece of gorse blossoms, the strong sweet odor of which intoxicated her like the bouquet of wine, while the distant sound of the waves rolling on the beach seemed like a billow rocking her spirit.

A love of solitude came upon her in the sweet freshness of this landscape and in the calm of the rounded horizon, and she would remain sitting so long on the hill tops that the wild rabbits would bound by her feet.

She planted memories everywhere, as seeds are cast upon the earth, memories whose roots hold till death. It seemed to Jeanne that she wast casting a little of her heart into every fold of these valleys. She became infatuated with sea bathing. When she was well out from shore, she would float on her back, her arms crossed, her eyes lost in the profound blue of the sky which was cleft by the flight of a swallow, or the white silhouette of a seabird.

After these excursions she invariably came back to the castle pale with hunger, but light, alert, a smile on her lips and her eyes sparkling with happiness.

The baron on his part was planning great agricultural enterprises. Occasionally, also, he went out to sea with the sailors of Yport. On several occasions he went fishing for mackerel and,

again, by moonlight, he would haul in the nets laid the night before. He loved to hear the masts creak, to breathe in the fresh and whistling gusts of wind that arose during the night; and, after having tacked a long time to find the buoys, guiding himself by a peak of rocks, the roof of a belfry or the Fécamp lighthouse, he delighted to remain motionless beneath the first gleams of the rising sun which made the slimy backs of the large fan-shaped rays and the fat bellies of the turbots glisten on the deck of the boat.

At each meal he gave an enthusiastic account of his expeditions, and the baroness in her turn told how many times she had walked down the main avenue of poplars.

As she had been advised to take exercise she made a business of walking, beginning as soon as the air grew warm. Leaning upon Rosalie's arm and dragging her left foot, which was rather heavier than the right, she wandered interminably up and down from the house to the edge of the wood, sitting down for five minutes at either end. The walking was resumed in the afternoon. A physician, consulted ten years before, had spoken of hypertrophy because she had suffered from suffocation. Ever since, this word had been used to describe the ailment of the baroness. The baron would say "my wife's hypertrophy" and Jeanne "mamma's hypertrophy" as they would have spoken of her hat, her dress, or her umbrella. She had been very pretty in her youth and slim as a reed. Now she had grown older, stouter, but she still remained poetical, having always retained the impression of "Corinne," which she had read as a girl. She read all the sentimental love stories it was possible to collect, and her thoughts wandered among tender adventures in which she always figured as the heroine. Her new home was infinitely pleasing to her because it formed such a beautiful framework for the romance of her soul, the surrounding woods, the waste land, and the proximity of the ocean recalling to her mind the novels of Sir Walter Scott, which she had been devouring for some months. On rainy days she remained shut up in her room, sending Rosalie in a special manner for the drawer containing her "souvenirs," which meant to the baroness all her old private and family letters.

Occasionally, Jeanne replaced Rosalie in the walks with her mother, and she listened eagerly to the tales of the latter's childhood. The young girl saw herself in all these romantic stories, and was astonished at the similarity of ideas and desires; each heart imagines itself to have been the first to tremble at those very sensations that awakened the hearts of the first beings, and that will awaken the hearts of the last.

One afternoon as the baroness and Jeanne were resting on the beach at the end of the walk, a stout priest who was moving in their direction greeted them with a bow, while still at a distance. He bowed when within three feet and, assuming a smiling air, cried: "Well, Madame la Baronne, how are you?" It was the village priest. The baroness seldom went to church, though she liked priests, from a sort of religious instinct peculiar to women. She had, in fact, entirely forgotten the Abbé Picot, her priest, and blushed as she saw him. She made apologies for not having prepared for his visit, but the good man was not

at all embarrassed. He looked at Jeanne, complimented her on her appearance and sat down, placing his three-cornered hat on his knees. He was very stout, very red, and perspired profusely. He drew from his pocket every moment an enormous checked handkerchief and passed it over his face and neck, but hardly was the task completed when necessity forced him to repeat the process. He was a typical country priest, talkative and kindly.

Presently the baron appeared. He was very friendly to the abbé and invited him to dinner. The priest was well versed in the art of being pleasant, thanks to the unconscious astuteness which the guiding of souls gives to the most mediocre of men who are called by the chance of events to exercise a power over their fellows. Toward dessert he became quite merry, with the gaiety that follows a pleasant meal, and as if struck by an idea he said: "I have a new parishioner whom I must present to you, Monsieur le Vicomte de Lamare." The baroness, who was at home in heraldry, inquired if he was of the family of Lamares of Eure. The priest answered, "Yes, madame, he is the son of Vicomte Jean de Lamare, who died last year." After this, the baroness, who loved the nobility above all other things, inquired the history of the young vicomte. He had paid his father's debts, sold the family castle, made his home on one of the three farms which he owned in the town of Etouvent. These estates brought him in an income of five or six thousand livres. The vicomte was economical and lived in this modest manner for two or three years, so that he might save enough to cut a figure in society, and to marry advantageously, without contracting debts or mortgaging his farms. The priest added, "He is a very charming young man, so steady and quiet, though there is very little to amuse him in the country." The baron said, "Bring him in to see us, Monsieur l'Abbé, it will be a distraction for him occasionally." After the coffee the baron and the priest took a turn about the grounds and then returned to say good-night to the ladies.

CHAPTER III

M. DE LAMARE

The following Sunday the baroness and Jeanne went to mass, prompted by a feeling of respect for their pastor, and after service waited to see the priest and invite him to luncheon the following Thursday. He came out of the sacristy leaning familiarly on the arm of a tall young man. As soon as he perceived the ladies, he exclaimed:

"How fortunate! Allow me, baroness and Mlle. Jeanne, to present to you your neighbor, M. le Vicomte de Lamare."

The vicomte said he had long desired to make their acquaintance, and began to converse in a well-bred manner. He

had a face of which women dream and that men dislike. His black, wavy hair shaded a smooth, sunburnt forehead, and two large straight eyebrows, that looked almost artificial, cast a deep and tender shadow over his dark eyes, the whites of which had a bluish tinge.

His long, thick eyelashes accentuated the passionate eloquence of his expression which wrought havoc in the drawing-rooms of society, and made peasant girls carrying baskets turn round to look at him. The languorous fascination of his glance impressed one with the depth of his thoughts and lent weight to his slightest words. His beard, fine and glossy, concealed a somewhat heavy jaw.

Two days later, M. de Lamare made his first call, just as they were discussing the best place for a new rustic bench. The vicomte was consulted and agreed with the baroness, who differed from her husband.

M. de Lamare expatiated on the picturesqueness of the country and from time to time, as if by chance, his eyes met those of Jeanne, and she felt a strange sensation at the quickly averted glance which betrayed tender admiration and an awakened sympathy.

M. de Lamare's father, who had died the preceding year, had known an intimate friend of the baroness's father, M. Cultaux, and this fact led to an endless conversation about family, relations, dates, etc., and names heard in her childhood were recalled, and led to reminiscences.

The baron, whose nature was rather uncultivated, and whose beliefs and prejudices were not those of his class, knew little about the neighboring families, and inquired about them from the vicomte, who responded:

"Oh, there are very few of the nobility in the district," just as he might have said, "there are very few rabbits on the hills," and he began to particularize: There was the Marquis de Coutelier, a sort of leader of Norman aristocracy, Vicomte and Vicomtess de Briseville, people of excellent stock, but living to themselves, and the Comte de Fourville, a kind of ogre, who was said to have made his wife die of sorrow, and who lived as a huntsman in his château of La Vrillette, built on a pond. There were a few parvenus among them who had bought properties here and there, but the vicomte did not know them.

As he left, his last glance was for Jeanne, as if it were a special tender and cordial farewell. The baroness was delighted with him, and the baron said: "Yes, indeed, he is a gentleman." And he was invited to dinner the following week, and from that time came regularly.

He generally arrived about four o'clock in the afternoon, went to join the baroness in "her avenue," and offered her his arm while she took her "exercise," as she called her daily walks. When Jeanne was at home she would walk on the other side of her mother, supporting her, and all three would walk slowly back and forth from one end of the avenue to the other. He seldom addressed Jeanne directly, but his eye frequently met hers.

He went to Yport several times with Jeanne and the baron. One evening, when they were on the beach, Père Lastique accosted him, and without removing his pipe, the absence of which would possibly have been more re-

markable than the loss of his nose, he said:

"With this wind, m'sieu le baron, we could easily go to Étretat and back to-morrow."

Jeanne clasped her hands imploringly:

"Oh, papa, let us do it!"

The baron turned to M. de Lamare:

"Will you join us, vicomte? We can take breakfast down there."

And the matter was decided at once. From daybreak Jeanne was up and waiting for her father, who dressed more slowly. They walked in the dew across the level and then through the wood vibrant with the singing of birds. The vicomte and Père Lastique were seated on a capstan.

Two other sailors helped to shove off the boat from shore, which was not easy on the shingly beach. Once the boat was afloat, they all took their seats, and the two sailors who remained on shore shoved it off. A light, steady breeze was blowing from the ocean and they hoisted the sail, veered a little, and then sailed along smoothly with scarcely any motion. To landward the high cliff at the right cast a shadow on the water at its base, and patches of sunlit grass here and there varied its monotonous whiteness. Yonder, behind them, brown sails were coming out of the white harbor of Fécamp, and ahead of them they saw a rock of curious shape, rounded, with gaps in it looking something like an immense elephant with its trunk in the water; it was the little port of Étretat.

Jeanne, a little dizzy from the motion of the waves, held the side of the boat with one hand as she looked out into the distance. It seemed to her as if only three things in the world were really beautiful: light, space, water.

No one spoke. Père Lastique, who was at the tiller, took a pull every now and then from a bottle hidden under the seat; and he smoked a short pipe which seemed inextinguishable, although he never seemed to relight it or refill it.

The baron, seated in the bow looked after the sail. Jeanne and the vicomte seemed a little embarrassed at being seated side by side. Some unknown power seemed to make their glances meet whenever they raised their eyes; between them there existed already that subtle and vague sympathy which arises so rapidly between two young people when the young man is good looking and the girl is pretty. They were happy in each other's society, perhaps because they were thinking of each other. The rising sun was beginning to pierce through the slight mist, and as its beams grew stronger, they were reflected on the smooth surface of the sea as in a mirror.

"How beautiful!" murmured Jeanne, with emotion.

"Beautiful indeed!" answered the vicomte. The serene beauty of the morning awakened an echo in their hearts.

And all at once they saw the great arches of Étretat, like two supports of a cliff standing in the sea high enough for vessels to pass under them; while a sharp-pointed white rock rose in front of the first arch. They reached shore, and the baron got out first to make fast the boat, while the vicomte lifted Jeanne ashore so that she should not wet her feet. Then they walked up the shingly beach side by side, and they overheard Père Lastique say to the

baron, "My! but they would make a pretty couple!"

They took breakfast in a little inn near the beach, and while the ocean had lulled their thoughts and made them silent, the breakfast table had the opposite effect, and they chattered like children on a vacation. The slightest thing gave rise to laughter.

Père Lastique, on taking his place at table, carefully hid his lighted pipe in his cap. That made them laugh. A fly, attracted no doubt by his red nose, persistently alighted on it, and each time it did so they burst into laughter. Finally the old man could stand it no longer, and murmured: "It is devilishly persistent!" whereupon Jeanne and the vicomte laughed till they cried.

After breakfast Jeanne suggested that they should take a walk. The vicomte rose, but the baron preferred to bask in the sun on the beach.

"Go on, my children, you will find me here in an hour."

They walked straight ahead of them, passing by several cottages and finally by a small château resembling a large farm, and found themselves in an open valley that extended for some distance. They now had a wild longing to run at large in the fields. Jeanne seemed to have a humming in her ears from all the new and rapidly changing sensations she had experienced. The burning rays of the sun fell on them. On both sides of the road the crops were bending over from the heat. The grasshoppers, as numerous as the blades of grass, were uttering their thin, shrill cry.

Perceiving a wood a little further on to the right, they walked over to it. They saw a narrow path between two hedges shaded by tall trees which shut out the sun. A sort of moist freshness in the air was perceptible, giving them a sensation of chilliness. There was no grass, owing to the lack of sunlight, but the ground was covered with a carpet of moss.

"See, we can sit down there a little while," she said.

They sat down and looked about them at the numerous forms of life that were in the air and on the ground at their feet, for a ray of sunlight penetrating the dense foliage brought them into its light.

"How beautiful it is here! How lovely it is in the country! There are moments when I should like to be a fly or a butterfly and hide in the flowers," said Jeanne with emotion.

They spoke in low tones as one does in exchanging confidences, telling of their daily lives and of their tastes, and declaring that they were already disgusted with the world, tired of its useless monotony; it was always the same thing; there was no truth, no sincerity in it.

The world! She would gladly have made its acquaintance; but she felt convinced beforehand that it was not equal to a country life, and the more their hearts seemed to be in sympathy, the more ceremonious they became, the more frequently their glances met and blended smiling; and it seemed that a new feeling of benevolence was awakened in them, a wider affection, an interest in a thousand things of which they had never hitherto thought.

They wended their way back, but the baron had already set off on foot for the Chambre aux Demoiselles, a grotto in a cleft at the summit of one of the

cliffs, and they waited for him at the inn. He did not return until five in the evening after a long walk along the cliffs.

They got into the boat, started off smoothly with the wind at their backs, scarcely seeming to make any headway. The breeze was irregular, at one moment filling the sail and then letting it flap idly along the mast. The sea seemed opaque and lifeless, and the sun was slowly approaching the horizon. The lulling motion of the sea had made them silent again. Presently Jeanne said, "How I should love to travel!"

"Yes, but it is tiresome to travel alone; there should be at least two, to exchange ideas," answered the vicomte. She reflected a moment.

"That is true—I like to walk alone, however—how pleasant it is to dream all alone——"

He gazed at her intently.

"Two can dream as well as one."

She lowered her eyes. Was it a hint? Possibly. She looked out at the horizon as if to discover something beyond it, and then said slowly:

"I should like to go to Italy—and Greece — ah, yes, Greece — and to Corsica—it must be so wild and so beautiful!"

He preferred Switzerland on account of its chalets and its lakes.

"No," said she, "I like new countries like Corsica, or very old countries full of souvenirs, like Greece. It must be delightful to find the traces of those people whose history we have known since childhood, to see places where great deeds were accomplished."

The vicomte, less enthusiastic, exclaimed:

"As for me, England attracts me very much; there is so much to be learned there."

Then they talked about the world in general, discussing the attractions of each country from the poles to the equator, enthusing over imaginary scenes and the peculiar manners of certain peoples like the Chinese and the Lapps; but they arrived at the conclusion that the most beautiful country in the world was France, with its temperate climate, cool in summer, mild in winter, its rich soil, its green forests, its worship of the fine arts which existed nowhere else since the glorious centuries of Athens. Then they were silent. The setting sun left a wide dazzling train of light which extended from the horizon to the edge of their boat. The wind subsided, the ripples disappeared, and the motionless sail was red in the light of the dying day. A limitless calm seemed to settle down on space and make a silence amid this conjunction of elements; and by degrees the sun slowly sank into the ocean.

Then a fresh breeze seemed to arise, a little shiver went over the surface of the water, as if the engulfed orb cast a sigh of satisfaction across the world. The twilight was short, night fell with its myriad stars. Père Lastique took the oars, and they saw that the sea was phosphorescent. Jeanne and the vicomte, side by side, watched the fitful gleams in the wake of the boat. They were hardly thinking, but simply gazing vaguely, breathing in the beauty of the evening in a state of delicious contentment; Jeanne had one hand on the seat and her neighbor's finger touched it as if by accident; she did not move; she was surprised, happy, though embarrassed at this slight contact.

When she reached home that evening and went to her room, she felt strangely disturbed, and so affected that the slightest thing impelled her to weep. She looked at her clock, imagining that the little bee on the pendulum was beating like a heart, the heart of a friend; that it was aware of her whole life, that with its quick, regular tickings it would accompany her whole life; and she stopped the golden fly to press a kiss on its wings. She would have kissed anything, no matter what. She remembered having hidden one of her old dolls of former days at the bottom of a drawer; she looked for it, took it out, and was delighted to see it again, as people are to see loved friends; and pressing it to her heart, she covered its painted cheeks and curly wig with kisses. And as she held it in her arms, she thought:

Can *he* be the husband promised through a thousand secret voices, whom a superlatively good Providence had thus thrown across her path? Was he, indeed, the being created for her—the being to whom she would devote her existence? Were they the two predestined beings whose affection, blending in one, would beget love?

She did not as yet feel that tumultuous emotion, that mad enchantment, those deep stirrings which she thought were essential to the tender passion; but it seemed to her she was beginning to fall in love, for she sometimes felt a sudden faintness when she thought of him, and she thought of him incessantly. His presence stirred her heart; she blushed and grew pale when their eyes met, and trembled at the sound of his voice.

From day to day the longing for love increased. She consulted the marguerites, the clouds, and coins which she tossed in the air.

One day her father said to her:

"Make yourself look pretty to-morrow morning."

"Why, papa?"

"That is a secret," he replied.

And when she came downstairs the following morning, looking fresh and sweet in a pretty light dress, she found the drawing-room table covered with boxes of bonbons, and on a chair an immense bouquet.

A covered wagon drove into the courtyard bearing the inscription, "Lerat, Confectioner, Fécamp; Wedding Breakfasts," and from the back of the wagon Ludivine and a kitchen helper were taking out large flat baskets which emitted an appetizing odor.

The Vicomte de Lamare appeared on the scene, his trousers were strapped down under his dainty boots of patent leather, which made his feet appear smaller. His long frock coat, tight at the waist line, was open at the bosom showing the lace of his ruffle, and a fine neckcloth wound several times round his neck obliged him to hold erect his handsome brown head, with its air of serious distinction. Jeanne, in astonishment, looked at him as though she had never seen him before. She thought he looked the grand seigneur from his head to his feet.

He bowed and said, smiling:

"Well, comrade, are you ready?"

"But what is it? What is going on?" she stammered.

"You will know presently," said the baron.

The carriage drove up to the door, and Madame Adelaide, in festal array,

descended the staircase, leaning on the arm of Rosalie, who was so much affected at the sight of M. de Lamare's elegant appearance that the baron whispered:

"I say, vicomte, I think our maid admires you."

The vicomte blushed up to his ears, pretended not to have heard and, taking up the enormous bouquet, handed it to Jeanne. She accepted it, more astonished than ever. They all four got into the carriage, and Ludivine, who brought a cup of bouillon to the baroness to sustain her strength, said:

"Truly, madame, one would say it was a wedding!"

They alighted as soon as they entered Yport, and as they walked through the village the sailors, in their new clothes, still showing the creases, came out of their homes, and shaking hands with the baron, following the party as if it were a procession. The vicomte, who had offered his arm to Jeanne, walked with her at the head.

When they reached the church they stopped, and an acolyte appeared holding upright the large silver crucifix, followed by another boy in red and white, who bore a chalice containing holy water.

Then came three old cantors, one of them limping; then the trumpet ("serpent"), and last, the curé with his gold embroidered stole. He smiled and nodded a greeting; then, with his eyes half closed, his lips moving in prayer, his beretta well over his forehead, he followed his surpliced bodyguard, walking in the direction of the sea.

On the beach a crowd was standing around a new boat wreathed with flowers. Its mast, sail and ropes were covered with long streams of ribbon that floated in the breeze, and the name, "Jeanne," was painted in gold letters on the stern.

Père Lastique, the proprietor of this boat, built with the baron's money, advanced to meet the procession. All the men, simultaneously, took off their hats, and a row of pious persons wearing long black cloaks falling in large folds from their shoulders, knelt down in a circle at sight of the crucifix.

The curé walked, with an acolyte on either side of him, to one end of the boat, while at the other end, the three old cantors, in their white surplices, with a serious air and their eyes fixed on the psalter, sang at the top of their voices in the clear morning air. Each time they stopped to take breath, the "serpent" continued its bellowing alone, and as he puffed out his cheeks the musician's little gray eyes disappeared, and the skin of his forehead and neck seemed to distend.

The motionless, transparent sea seemed to be taking part meditatively in the baptism of this boat, rolling its tiny waves, no higher than a finger, with the faint sound of a rake on the shingle. And the big white gulls, with their wings unfurled, circled about in the blue heavens, flying off and then coming back in a curve above the heads of the kneeling crowd, as if to see what they were doing.

The singing ceased after an Amen that lasted five minutes; and the priest, in an unctuous voice, murmured some Latin words, of which one could hear only the sonorous endings. He then walked round the boat, sprinkling it with holy water, and next began to murmur the "Oremus," standing along-

side the boat opposite the sponsors, who remained motionless, hand in hand.

The vicomte had the usual grave expression on his handsome face, but Jeanne, choking with a sudden emotion, and on the verge of fainting, began to tremble so violently that her teeth chattered. The dream that had haunted her for some time was suddenly beginning, as if in a kind of hallucination, to take the appearance of reality. They had spoken of a wedding, a priest was present, blessing them; men in surplices were singing psalms; was it not she whom they were giving in marriage.

Did her fingers send out an electric shock, did the emotion of her heart follow the course of her veins until it reached the heart of her companion? Did he understand, did he guess, was he, like herself, pervaded by a sort of intoxication of love? Or else, did he know by experience, alone, that no woman could resist him? She suddenly noticed that he was squeezing her hand, gently at first, and then tighter, tighter, till he almost crushed it. And without moving a muscle of his face, without anyone perceiving it, he said—yes, he certainly said:

"Oh, Jeanne, if you would consent, this would be our betrothal."

She lowered her head very slowly, perhaps meaning it for "yes." And the priest, who was still sprinkling the holy water, sprinkled some on their fingers.

The ceremony was over. The women rose. The return was unceremonious. The crucifix had lost its dignity in the hands of the acolyte, who walked rapidly, the crucifix swaying to right and left, or bending forward as though it would fall. The priest, who was not praying now, walked hurriedly behind them; the cantors and the musician with the "serpent" had disappeared by a narrow street, so as to get off their surplices without delay; and the sailors hurried along in groups. One thought prompted their haste, and made their mouths water.

A good breakfast was awaiting them at "The Poplars."

The large table was set in the courtyard, under the apple trees.

Sixty people sat down to table, sailors and peasants. The baroness in the middle, with a priest at either side of her, one from Yport, and the other belonging to "The Poplars." The baron seated opposite her on the other side of the table, the mayor on one side of him, and his wife, a thin peasant woman, already aging, who kept smiling and bowing to all around her, on the other.

Jeanne, seated beside her co-sponsor, was in a sea of happiness. She saw nothing, knew nothing, and remained silent, her mind bewildered with joy.

Presently she said:

"What is your Christian name?"

"Julien," he replied. "Did you not know?"

But she made no reply, thinking to herself:

"How often I shall repeat that name!"

When the feast was over, the courtyard was given up to the sailors, and the others went over to the other side of the château. The baroness began to take her exercise, leaning on the arm of the baron and accompanied by the two priests. Jeanne and Julien went toward the wood and walked along one of the mossy paths. Suddenly seizing her hands, the vicomte said:

"Tell me, will you be my wife?"

She lowered her head, and as he stammered: "Answer me, I implore you!" she raised her eyes to his, timidly, and he read his answer there.

CHAPTER IV

MARRIAGE AND DISILLUSION

The baron, one morning, entered Jeanne's room before she was up, and sitting down at the foot of her bed, said:

"M. le Vicomte de Lamare has asked us for your hand in marriage."

She wanted to hide her face under the sheets.

Her father continued:

"We have postponed our answer for the present."

She gasped, choking with emotion. At the end of a minute the baron, smiling, added:

"We did not wish to do anything without consulting you. Your mother and I are not opposed to this marriage, but we would not seek to influence you. You are much richer than he is; but, when it is a question of the happiness of a life, one should not think too much about money. He has no relations left. If you marry him, then, it would be as if a son should come into our family; if it were anyone else, it would be you, our daughter, who would go among strangers. The young fellow pleases us. Would he please you?"

She stammered, blushing up to the roots of her hair:

"I am willing, papa."

And the father, looking into her eyes and still smiling, murmured:

"I half suspected it, young lady."

She lived till evening in a condition of exhilaration, not knowing what she was doing, mechanically thinking of one thing by mistake for another, and with a feeling of weariness, although she had not walked at all.

Toward six o'clock, as she was sitting with her mother under the plane trees, the vicomte appeared.

Jeanne's heart began to throb wildly. The young man approached them apparently without any emotion. When he was close beside them, he took the baroness' hand and kissed her fingers, then raising to his lips the trembling hand of the young girl, he imprinted upon it a long, tender and grateful kiss.

And the radiant season of betrothal commenced. They would chat together alone in the corner of the parlor, or else seated on the moss at the end of the wood overlooking the plain. Sometimes they walked in Little Mother's Avenue; he, talking of the future, she, with her eyes cast down, looking at the dusty footprints of the baroness.

Once the matter was decided, they desired to waste no time in preliminaries. It was, therefore, decided that the ceremony should take place in six weeks, on the fifteenth of August; and that the bride and groom should set out immediately on their wedding journey. Jeanne, on being consulted as to

which country she would like to visit, decided on Corsica where they could be more alone than in the cities of Italy.

They awaited the moment appointed for their marriage without too great impatience, but enfolded, lost in a delicious affection, expressed in the exquisite charm of insignificant caresses, pressure of hands, long passionate glances in which their souls seemed to blend; and, vaguely tortured by an uncertain longing for they knew not what.

They decided to invite no one to the wedding except Aunt Lison, the baron's sister, who boarded in a convent at Versailles. After the death of their father, the baroness wished to keep her sister with her. But the old maid, possessed by the idea that she was in every one's way, was useless, and a nuisance, retired into one of those religious houses that rent apartments to people that live a sad and lonely existence. She came from time to time to pass a month or two with her family.

She was a little woman of few words, who always kept in the background, appeared only at mealtimes, and then retired to her room where she remained shut in.

She looked like a kind old lady, though she was only forty-two, and had a sad, gentle expression. She was never made much of by her family as a child, being neither pretty nor boisterous, she was never petted, and she would stay quietly and gently in a corner. She had been neglected ever since. As a young girl nobody paid any attention to her. She was something like a shadow, or a familiar object, a living piece of furniture that one is accustomed to see every day, but about which one does not trouble oneself.

Her sister, from long habit, looked upon her as a failure, an altogether insignificant being. They treated her with careless familiarity which concealed a sort of contemptuous kindness. She called herself Lise, and seemed embarrassed at this frivolous youthful name. When they say that she probably would not marry, they changed it from Lise to Lison, and since Jeanne's birth, she had become "Aunt Lison," a poor relation, very neat, frightfully timid, even with her sister and her brother-in-law, who loved her, but with an uncertain affection verging on indifference, with an unconscious compassion and a natural benevolence.

Sometimes, when the baroness talked of far away things that happened in her youth, she would say, in order to fix a date: "It was the time that Lison had that attack."

They never said more than that; and this "attack" remained shrouded, as in a mist.

One evening, Lise, who was then twenty, had thrown herself into the water, no one knew why. Nothing in her life, her manner, gave any intimation of this seizure. They fished her out half dead, and her parents, raising their hands in horror, instead of seeking the mysterious cause of this action, had contented themselves with calling it "that attack," as if they were talking of the accident that happened to the horse "Coco," who had broken his leg a short time before in a ditch, and whom they had been obliged to kill.

From that time Lise, presently Lison, was considered feeble-minded. The gentle contempt which she inspired in her relations gradually made its way into the minds of all those who sur-

rounded her. Little Jeanne herself, with the natural instinct of children, took no notice of her, never went up to kiss her good-night, never went into her room. Good Rosalie, alone, who gave the room all the necessary attention, seemed to know where it was situated.

When Aunt Lison entered the dining-room for breakfast, the little one would go up to her from habit and hold up her forehead to be kissed; that was all.

If anyone wished to speak to her, they sent a servant to call her, and if she was not there, they did not bother about her, never thought of her, never thought of troubling themselves so much as to say:

"Why, I have not seen Aunt Lison this morning!"

When they said "Aunt Lison," these two words awakened no feeling of affection in anyone's mind. It was as if one had said: "The coffee pot, or the sugar bowl."

She always walked with little, quick, silent steps, never made a noise, never knocking up against anything; and seemed to communicate to surrounding objects the faculty of not making any sound. Her hands seemed to be made of a kind of wadding, she handled everything so lightly and delicately.

She arrived about the middle of July, all upset at the idea of this marriage. She brought a quantity of presents which, as they came from her, remained almost unnoticed. On the following day they had forgotten she was there at all.

But an unsual emotion was seething in her mind, and she never took her eyes off the engaged couple. She interested herself in Jeanne's trousseau with a singular eagerness, a feverish activity, working like a simple seamstress in her room, where no one came to visit her.

She was continually presenting the baroness with handkerchiefs she had hemmed herself, towels on which she had embroidered a monogram, saying as she did so: "Is that all right, Adelaide?" And little mother, as she carelessly examined the objects, would reply: "Do not give yourself so much trouble, my poor Lison."

One evening, toward the end of the month, after an oppressively warm day, the moon rose on one of those clear, mild nights which seem to move, stir and affect one, apparently awakening all the secret poetry of one's soul. The gentle breath of the fields was wafted into the quiet drawing-room. The baroness and her husband were playing cards by the light of a lamp, and Aunt Lison was sitting beside them knitting; while the young people, leaning on the window sill, were gazing out at the moonlit garden.

The linden and the plane tree cast their shadows on the lawn which extended beyond it in the moonlight, as far as the dark wood. Attracted by the tender charm of the night, and by this misty illumination that lighted up the trees and the bushes, Jeanne turned toward her parents and said:

"Little father, we are going to take a short stroll on the grass in front of the house."

The baron replied, without looking up: "Go, my children," and continued his game.

They went out and began to walk slowly along the moonlit lawn as far

as the little wood at the end. The hour grew late and they did not think of going in. The baroness grew tired, and wishing to retire, she said:

"We must call the lovers in."

The baron cast a glance across the spacious garden where the two forms were wandering slowly.

"Let them alone," he said; "it is so delicious outside! Lison will wait for them, will you not, Lison?"

The old maid raised her troubled eyes and replied in her timid voice:

"Certainly, I will wait for them."

Little father gave his hand to the baroness, weary himself from the heat of the day.

"I am going to bed, too," he said, and went up with his wife.

Then Aunt Lison rose in her turn, and leaving on the arm of the chair her canvas with the wool and the knitting needles, she went over and leaned on the window sill and gazed out at the night.

The two lovers kept on walking back and forth between the house and the wood. They squeezed each other's fingers without speaking, as though they had left their bodies and formed part of this visible poetry that exhaled from the earth.

All at once Jeanne perceived, framed in the window, the silhouette of the aunt, outlined by the light of the lamp behind her.

"See," she said, "there is Aunt Lison looking at us."

The vicomte raised his head, and said in an indifferent tone without thinking:

"Yes, Aunt Lison is looking at us."

And they continued to dream, to walk slowly, and to love each other. But the dew was falling fast, and the dampness made them shiver a little.

"Let us go in now," said Jeanne. And they went into the house.

When they entered the drawing-room, Aunt Lison had gone back to her work. Her head was bent over her work, and her fingers were trembling as if she were very tired.

"It is time to go to bed, aunt," said Jeanne, approaching her.

Her aunt turned her head, and her eyes were red as if she had been crying. The young people did not notice it; but suddenly M. de Lamare perceived that Jeanne's thin shoes were covered with dew. He was worried, and asked tenderly:

"Are not your dear little feet cold?"

All at once the old lady's hands shook so violently that she let fall her knitting, and hiding her face in her hands, she began to sob convulsively.

The engaged couple looked at her in amazement, without moving. Suddenly Jeanne fell on her knees, and taking her aunt's hands away from her face, said in perplexity:

"Why, what is the matter, Aunt Lison?"

Then the poor woman, her voice full of tears, and her whole body shaking with sorrow, replied:

"It was when he asked you—are not your—your—dear little feet cold?—no one ever said such things to me—to me—never—never——"

Jeanne, surprised and compassionate, could still hardly help laughing at the idea of an admirer showing tender solicitude for Lison; and the vicomte had turned away to conceal his mirth.

But the aunt suddenly rose, laying her ball of wool on the floor and her

knitting in the chair, and fled to her room, feeling her way up the dark staircase.

Left alone, the young people looked at one another, amused and saddened. Jeanne murmured: "Poor aunt!" Julien replied. "She must be a little crazy this evening."

They held each other's hands and presently, gently, very gently, they exchanged their first kiss, and by the following day had forgotten all about Aunt Lison's tears.

The two weeks preceding the wedding found Jeanne very calm, as though she were weary of tender emotions. She had no time for reflection on the morning of the eventful day. She was only conscious of a feeling as if her flesh, her bones and her blood had all melted beneath her skin, and on taking hold of anything, she noticed that her fingers trembled.

She did not regain her self-possession until she was in the chancel of the church during the marriage ceremony.

Married! So she was married! All that had occurred since daybreak seemed to her a dream, a waking dream. There are such moments, when all appears changed around us; even our emotions seem to have a new meaning; even the hours of the day, which seem to be out of their usual time. She felt bewildered, above all else, bewildered. Last evening nothing had as yet been changed in her life; the constant hope of her life seemed only nearer, almost within reach. She had gone to rest a young girl; she was now a married woman. She had crossed that boundary that seems to conceal the future with all its joys, its dreams of happiness. She felt as though a door had opened in front of her; she was about to enter into the fulfillment of her expectations.

When they appeared on the threshold of the church after the ceremony, a terrific noise caused the bride to start in terror, and the baroness to scream; it was a rifle salute given by the peasants, and the firing did not cease until they reached "The Poplars."

After a collation served for the family, the family chaplain, and the priest from Yport, the mayor and the witnesses, who were some of the large farmers of the district, they all walked in the garden. On the other side of the château one could hear the boisterous mirth of the peasants, who were drinking cider beneath the apple trees. The whole countryside, dressed in their best, filled the courtyard.

Jeanne and Julien walked through the copse and then up the slope and, without speaking, gazed out at the sea. The air was cool, although it was the middle of August; the wind was from the north, and the sun blazed down unpityingly from the blue sky. The young people sought a more sheltered spot, and crossing the plain, they turned to the right, toward the rolling and wooded valley that leads to Yport. As soon as they reached the trees the air was still, and they left the road and took a narrow path beneath the trees, where they could scarcely walk abreast.

Jeanne felt an arm passed gently round her waist. She said nothing, her breath came quick, her heart beat fast. Some low branches caressed their hair, as they bent to pass under them. She picked a leaf; two ladybirds were concealed beneath it, like two delicate red shells.

"Look, a little family," she said innocently, and feeling a little more confidence.

Julien placed his mouth to her ear, and whispered: "This evening you will be my wife."

Although she had learned many things during her sojourn in the country, she dreamed of nothing as yet but the poetry of love, and was **surprised.** His wife? Was she not that **already?**

Then he began to kiss her temples and neck, little light kisses. Startled each time afresh by these masculine kisses to which she was not accustomed, she instinctively turned away her head to avoid them, though they delighted her. But they had come to the edge of the wood. She stopped, embarrassed at being so far from home. What would they think?

"Let us go home," she said.

He withdrew his arm from her waist, and as they turned round they stood face to face, so close that they could feel each other's breath on their faces. They gazed deep into one another's eyes with that gaze in which two souls seem to blend. They sought the impenetrable unknown of each other's being. They sought to fathom one another, mutely and persistently. What would they be to one another? What would this life be that they were about to begin together? What joys, what happiness, or what disillusions were they preparing in this long, indissoluble tête-à-tête of marriage? And it seemed to them as if they had never yet seen each other.

Suddenly, Julien, placing his two hands on his wife's shoulders, kissed her full on the lips as she had never before been kissed. The kiss, penetrating as it did her very blood and marrow, gave her such a mysterious shock that she pushed Julien wildly away with her two arms, almost falling backward as she did so.

"Let us go away, let us go away," she faltered.

He did not reply, but took both her hands and held them in his. They walked home in silence, and the rest of the afternoon seemed long. The dinner was simple and did not last long, contrary to the usual Norman custom. A sort of embarrassment seemed to paralyze the guests. The two priests, the mayor, and the four farmers invited, alone betrayed a little of that broad mirth that is supposed to accompany weddings.

They had apparently forgotten how to laugh, when a remark of the mayor's woke them up. It was about nine o'clock; coffee was about to be served. Outside, under the apple-trees of the first court, the bal champêtre was beginning, and through the open window one could see all that was going on. Lanterns, hung from the branches, gave the leaves a grayish green tint. Rustics and their partners danced in a circle shouting a wild dance tune to the feeble accompaniment of two violins and a clarinet, the players seated on a large table as a platform. The boisterous singing of the peasants at times completely drowned the instruments, and the feeble strains torn to tatters by the unrestrained voices seemed to fall from the air in shreds, in little fragments of scattered notes.

Two large barrels surrounded by flaming torches were tapped, and two servant maids were kept busy rinsing glasses and bowls in order to refill them

at the tap whence flowed the red wine, or at the tap of the cider barrel. On the table were bread, sausages and cheese. Every one swallowed a mouthful from time to time, and beneath the roof of illuminated foliage this wholesome and boisterous fête made the melancholy watchers in the dining-room long to dance also, and to drink from one of those large barrels, while they munched a slice of bread and butter and a raw onion.

The mayor, who was beating time with his knife, cried: "By Jove, that is all right; it is like the wedding of Ganache."

A suppressed giggle was heard, but Abbé Picot, the natural enemy of civil authority, cried: "You mean of Cana." The other did not accept the correction. "No, monsieur le curé, I know what I am talking about; when I say Ganache, I mean Ganache."

They rose from the table and went into the drawing-room, and then outside to mix with the merry-makers. The guests soon left.

They went into the house. They were surprised to see Madame Adelaide sobbing on Julien's shoulder. Her tears, noisy tears, as if blown out by a pair of bellows, seemed to come from her nose, her mouth and her eyes at the same time; and the young man, dumfounded, awkward, was supporting the heavy woman who had sunk into his arms to commend to his care her darling, her little one, her adored daughter.

The baron rushed toward them, saying: "Oh, no scenes, no tears, I beg of you," and, taking his wife to a chair, he made her sit down, while she wiped away her tears. Then, turning to Jeanne: "Come, little one, kiss your mother and go to bed."

What happened then? She could hardly have told, for she seemed to have lost her head, but she felt a showed of little grateful kisses on her lips.

Day **dawned.** Julien awoke, yawned, stretched **looked** at his wife, smiled and asked: **"Did** you sleep well, darling?"

She noticed that he now said "thou,," and she replied, bewildered, "Why, yes. And you?" "Oh, very well," he answered. And turning toward her, he kissed her and then began to chat quietly. He set before her plans of living, with the idea of economy, and this word occurring several times, astonished Jeanne. She listened without grasping the meaning of his words, looked at him, but was thinking of a thousand things that passed rapidly through her mind hardly leaving a trace.

The clock struck eight. "Come, we must get up," he said. "It would look ridiculous for us to be late." When he was dressed he assisted his wife with all the little details of her toilet, not allowing her to call Rosalie. As they left the room he stopped. "You know, when we are alone, we can now use 'thou,' but before your parents it is better to wait a while. It will be quite natural when we come back from our wedding journey."

She did not go down till luncheon was ready. The day passed like any ordinary day, as if nothing new had occurred. There was one man more in the house, that was all.

CHAPTER V

CORSICA AND A NEW LIFE

Four days later the travelling carriage arrived that was to take them to Marseilles.

After the first night Jeanne had become accustomed to Julien's kisses and caresses, although her repugnance to a closer intimacy had not diminished. She thought him handsome, she loved him. She again felt happy and cheerful.

The farewells were short and without sadness. The baroness alone seemed tearful. As the carriage was just starting she placed a purse, heavy as lead, in her daughter's hand, saying, "That is for your little expenses as a bride."

Jeanne thrust the purse in her pocket and the carriage started.

Toward evening Julien said: "How much money did your mother give you in that purse?"

She had not given it a thought, and she poured out the contents on her knees. A golden shower filled her lap: two thousand francs. She clapped her hands. "I shall commit all kinds of extravagance," she said as she replaced it in the purse.

After travelling eight days in terribly hot weather they reached Marseilles. The following day the *Roi-Louis,* a little mail steamer which went to Naples by way of Ajaccio, took them to Corsica.

Corsica! Its "maquis," its bandits, its mountains! The birthplace of Napoleon! It seemed to Jeanne that she was leaving real life to enter into a dream, although wide awake. Standing side by side on the bridge of the steamer, they looked at the cliffs of Provence as they passed swiftly by them. The calm sea of deep blue seemed petrified beneath the ardent rays of the sun.

"Do you remember our excursion in Père Lastique's boat?" said Jeanne.

Instead of replying, he gave her a hasty kiss on the ear.

The paddle-wheels struck the water, disturbing its torpor, and a long track of foam like the froth of champagne remained in the wake of the boat, reaching as far as the eye could see. Jeanne drank in with delight the odor of the salt mist that seemed to go to the very tips of her fingers. Everywhere the sea. But ahead of them there was something gray, not clearly defined in the early dawn; a sort of massing of strange-looking clouds, pointed, jagged, seemed to rest on the waters.

Presently it became clearer, its outline more distinct on the brightening sky; a large chain of mountains, peaked and weird, appeared. It was Corsica, covered with a light veil of mist. The sun rose behind it, outlining the jagged crests like black shadows. Then all the summits were bathed in light, while the rest of the island remained covered with mist.

The captain, a little sun-browned man, dried up, stunted, toughened and shrivelled by the harsh salt winds, appeared on the bridge and in a voice hoarse after twenty years of command and worn from shouting amid the

storms, said to Jeanne:

"Do you perceive it, that odor?"

She certainly noticed a strong and peculiar odor of plants, a wild aromatic odor.

"That is Corsica that sends out that fragrance, madame," said the captain. "It is her peculiar odor of a pretty woman. After being away for twenty years, I should recognize it five miles out at sea. I belong to it. He, down there, at Saint Helena, he speaks of it always, it seems, of the odor of his native country. He belongs to my family."

And the captain, taking off his hat, saluted Corsica, saluted down yonder, across the ocean, the great captive emperor who belonged to his family.

Jeanne was so affected that she almost cried.

Then, pointing toward the horizon, the captain said: "Les Sanguinaires."

Julien was standing beside his wife, with his arm round her waist, and they both looked out into the distance to see what he was alluding to. They at length perceived some pyramidal rocks which the vessel rounded presently to enter an immense peaceful gulf surrounded by lofty summits, the base of which was covered with what looked like moss.

Pointing to this verdant growth, the captain said: "Le maquis."

As they proceeded on their course the circle of mountains appeared to close in behind the steamer, which moved along slowly in such a lake of transparent azure that one could sometimes see to the bottom.

The town suddenly appeared perfectly white at the end of the gulf, on the edge of the water, at the base of the mountains. Some little Italian boats were anchored in the dock. Four or five rowboats came up beside the *Roi-Louis* to get passengers.

Julien, who was collecting the baggage, asked his wife in a low tone: "Twenty sous is enough, is it not, to give to the porter?" For a week he had constantly asked the same question, which annoyed her each time. She replied somewhat impatiently: "When one is not sure of giving enough, one gives too much."

He was always disputing with the hotel proprietors, with the servants, the drivers, the vendors of all kinds, and when, by dint of bargaining, he had obtained a reduction in price, he would say to Jeanne as he rubbed his hands: "I do not like to be cheated."

She trembled whenever a bill came in, certain beforehand of the remarks that he would make about each item, humiliated at this bargaining, blushing up to the roots of her hair beneath the contemptuous glances of the servants as they looked after her husband, while they held in their hand the meagre tip.

He had a dispute with the boatmen who landed him.

The first tree Jeanne saw was a palm. They went to a great, empty hotel at the corner of an immense square and ordered breakfast.

After an hour's rest they arranged an itinerary for their trip, and at the end of three days spent in this little town, hidden at the end of the blue gulf, and hot as a furnace enclosed in its curtain of mountains, which keep every breath of air from it, they decided to hire some saddle horses, so as to be able to cross any difficult pass, and selected two little Corsican stal-

lions with fiery eyes, thin and unwearying, and set out one morning at daybreak. A guide, mounted on a mule, accompanied them and carried the provisions, for inns are unknown in this wild country.

The road ran along the gulf and soon turned into a kind of valley, and on toward the high mountains. They frequently crossed the dry beds of torrents with only a tiny stream of water trickling under the stones, gurgling faintly like a wild animal in hiding.

The uncultivated country seemed perfectly barren. The sides of the hills were covered with tall weeds, yellow from the blazing sun. Sometimes they met a mountaineer, either on foot or mounted on a little horse, or astride a donkey about as big as a dog. They all carried a loaded rifle slung across their backs, old rusty weapons, but redoubtable in their hands.

The pungent odor of the aromatic herbs with which the island is overgrown seemed to make the air heavy. The road ascended gradually amid the long curves of the mountains. The red or blue granite peaks gave an appearance of fairyland to the wild landscape, and on the foothills immense forests of chestnut trees looked like green brush, compared with the elevations above them.

Sometimes the guide, reaching out his hand toward some of these heights, would repeat a name. Jeanne and Julien would look where he pointed, but see nothing, until at last they discovered something gray, like a mass of stones fallen from the summit. It was a little village, a hamlet of granite hanging there, fastened on like a veritable bird's nest and almost invisible on the huge mountain.

Walking their horses like this made Jeanne nervous. "Let us go faster," she said. And she whipped up her horse. Then, as she did not hear her husband following her, she turned round and laughed heartily as she saw him coming along, pale, and holding on to his horse's mane as it bounced him up and down. His very appearance of a "beau cavalier" made his awkwardness and timidity all the more comical.

They trotted along quietly. The road now ran between two interminable forests of brush, which covered the whole side of the mountain like a garment. This was the "Maquis," composed of scrub oak, juniper, arbutus, mastic, privet, gorse, laurel, myrtle and boxwood, intertwined with clematis, huge ferns, honeysuckle, cytisus, rosemary, lavender and brambles, which covered the sides of the mountain with an impenetrable fleece.

They were hungry. The guide rejoined them and led them to one of those charming springs so frequent in rocky countries, a tiny thread of iced water issuing from a little hole in the rock and flowing into a chestnut leaf that some passerby had placed there to guide the water into one's mouth.

Jeanne felt so happy that she could hardly restrain herself from screaming for joy.

They continued their journey and began to descend the slope winding round the Bay of Sagone. Toward evening they passed through Cargese, the Greek village founded by a colony of refugees who were driven from their country. Tall, beautiful girls, with rounded hips, long hands and slender waists, and singularly graceful, were grouped beside a

fountain. Julien called out, "Good evening," and they replied in musical tones in the harmonious language of their own land.

When they reached Piana they had to beg for hospitality, as in ancient times and in desert lands. Jeanne trembled with joy as they waited for the door to be opened after Julien knocked. Oh, this was a journey worth while, with all the unexpected of unexplored paths.

It happened to be the home of a young couple. They received the travellers as the patriarchs must have received the guest sent by God. They had to sleep on a corn husk mattress in an old moldy house. The woodwork, all eaten by worms, overrun with long boring-worms, seemed to emit sounds, to be alive and to sigh.

They set off again at daybreak, and presently stopped before a forest, a veritable forest of purple granite. There were peaks, pillars, bell-towers, wondrous forms molded by age, the ravaging wind and the sea mist. As much as three hundred metres in height, slender, round, twisted, hooked, deformed, unexpected and fantastic, these amazing rocks looked like trees, plants, animals, monuments, men, monks in their garb, horned devils, gigantic birds, a whole population of monsters, a menagerie of nightmares petrified by the will of some eccentric divinity.

Jeanne had ceased talking, her heart was full. She took Julien's hand and squeezed it, overcome with a longing for love in presence of the beauty of nature.

Suddenly, as they emerged from this chaos, they saw before them another gulf, encircled by a wall of blood-red granite. And these red rocks were reflected in the blue waters.

"Oh, Julien!" faltered Jeanne, unable to speak for wonder and choking with her emotion. Two tears fell from her eyes. Julian gazed at her in astonishment and said:

"What is the matter, my pet?"

She wiped away her tears, smiled and replied in a rather shaky voice:

"Nothing—I am nervous—I do not know—it just came over me. I am so happy that the least thing affects me."

He could not understand these feminine attacks of "nerves," the shocks of these vibrant beings, excited at nothing, whom enthusiasm stirs as might a catastrophe, whom an imperceptible sensation completely upsets, driving them wild with joy or despair.

These tears seemed absurd to him, and thinking only of the bad road, he said:

"You would do better to watch your horse."

They descended an almost impassable path to the shore of the gulf, then turned to the right to ascend the gloomy Val d'Ota.

But the road was so bad that Julien proposed that they should go on foot. Jeanne was delighted. She was enchanted at the idea of walking, of being alone with him after her late emotion.

The guide went ahead with the mule and the horses and they walked slowly.

The mountain, cleft from top to bottom, spreads apart. The path lies in this breach, between two gigantic walls. A roaring torrent flows through the gorge. The air is icy, the granite looks black, and high above one the glimpse of blue sky astonishes and bewilders one.

A sudden noise made Jeanne start. She raised her eyes. An immense bird flew away from a hollow; it was an eagle. His spread wings seemed to brush the two walls of the gorge and he soared into the blue and disappeared.

Farther on there was a double gorge and the path lay between the two in abrupt zigzags. Jeanne, careless and happy, took the lead, the pebbles rolling away beneath her feet, fearlessly leaning over the abysses. Julien followed her, somewhat out of breath, his eyes on the ground for fear of becoming dizzy.

All at once the sun shone down on them, and it seemed as if they were leaving the infernal regions. They were thirsty, and following a track of moisture, they crossed a wilderness of stones and found a little spring conducted into a channel made of a piece of hollowed-out wood for the benefit of the goatherds. A carpet of moss covered the ground all round it, and Jeanne and Julien knelt down to drink.

As they were enjoying the fresh cold water, Julien tried to draw Jeanne away to tease her. She resisted and their lips met and parted, and the stream of cold water splashed their faces, their necks, their clothes and their hands, and their kisses mingled in the stream.

They were a long time reaching the summit of the declivity, as the road was so winding and uneven, and they did not reach Evisa until evening and the house of Paoli Palabretti, a relative of their guide.

He was a tall man, somewhat bent, with the mournful air of a consumptive. He took them to their room, a cheerless room of bare stones, but handsome for this country, where all elegance is ignored. He expressed in his language —the Corsican patois, a jumble of French and Italian—his pleasure at welcoming them, when a shrill voice interrupted him. A little swarthy woman, with large black eyes, a skin warmed by the sun, a slender waist, teeth always showing in a perpetual smile, darted forward, kissed Jeanne, shook Julien's hand and said: "Good-day, madame; good-day, monsieur; I hope you are well."

She took their hats, shawls, carrying all on one arm, for the other was in a sling, and then she made them all go outside, saying to her husband: "Go and take them for a walk until dinner time."

M. Palabretti obeyed at once and walked between the two young people as he showed them the village. He dragged his feet and his words, coughing frequently, and repeating at each attack of coughing:

"It is the air of Val, which is cool, and has struck my chest."

He led them on a by-path beneath enormous chestnut trees. Suddenly he stopped and said in his monotonous voice: "It is here that my cousin, Jean Rinaldi, was killed by Mathieu Lori. See, I was there, close to Jean, when Mathieu appeared at ten paces from us. 'Jean,' he cried, 'do not go to Albertacce; do not go, Jean, or I will kill you. I warn you!'

"I took Jean's arm: 'Do not go there, Jean; he will do it.'

"It was about a girl whom they were both after, Paulina Sinacoupi.

"But Jean cried out: 'I am going, Mathieu; you will not be the one to prevent me.'

"Then Mathieu unslung his gun, and

before I could adjust mine, he fired.

"Jean leaped two feet in the air, like a child skipping, yes, monsieur, and he fell back full on me, so that my gun went off and rolled as far as the big chestnut tree over yonder.

"Jean's mouth was wide open, but he did not utter a word; he was dead."

The young people gazed in amazement at the calm witness of this crime. Jeanne asked:

"And what became of the assassin?"

Paoli Palabretti had a long fit of coughing and then said:

"He escaped to the mountain. It was my brother who killed him the following year. You know, my brother, Philippi Palabretti, the bandit."

Jeanne shuddered.

"Your brother a bandit?"

With a gleam of pride in his eye, the calm Corsican replied:

"Yes, madame. He was celebrated, that one. He laid low six gendarmes. He died at the same time as Nicolas Morali, when they were trapped in the Niolo, after six days of fighting, and were about to die of hunger."

"The country is worth it," he added with a resigned air in the same tone in which he said: "It is the air of the Val, which is cool."

Then they went home to dinner, and the little Corsican woman behaved as if she had known them for twenty years.

But Jeanne was worried. When Julien again held her in his arms, would she experience the same strange and intense sensation that she had felt on the moss beside the spring? And when they were alone together that evening she trembled lest she should still be insensible to his kisses. But she was reassured, and this was her first night of love.

The next day, as they were about to set out, she decided that she would not leave this humble cottage, where it seemed as though a fresh happiness had begun for her.

She called her host's little wife into her room and, while making clear that she did not mean it as a present, she insisted, even with some annoyance, on sending her from Paris, as soon as she arrived, a remembrance, a remembrance to which she attached an almost superstitious significance.

The little Corsican refused for some time, not wishing to accept it. But at last she consented, saying:

"Well, then, send me a little pistol, a very small one."

Jeanne opened her eyes in astonishment. The other added in her ear, as one confides a sweet and intimate secret: "It is to kill my brother-in-law." And smiling, she hastily unwound the bandages around the helpless arm, and showing her firm, white skin with the scratch of a stiletto across it, now almost healed, she said: "If I had not been almost as strong as he is, he would have killed me. My husband is not jealous, he knows me; and, besides, he is ill, you know, and that quiets your blood. And, besides, madame, I am an honest woman; but my brother-in-law believes all that he hears. He is jealous for my husband and he will surely try it again: Then I shall have my little pistol; I shall be easy, and sure of my revenge."

Jeanne promised to send the weapon, kissed her new friend tenderly and they set out on their journey.

The rest of the trip was nothing but a dream, a continual series of embraces,

an intoxication of caresses. She saw nothing, neither the landscape, nor the people, nor the places where they stopped. She saw nothing but Julien.

On arriving at Bastia, they had to pay the guide. Julien fumbled in his pockets. Not finding what he wanted, he said to Jeanne: "As you are not using your mother's two thousand francs, give them to me to carry. They will be safer in my belt, and it will avoid my having to make change."

She handed him her purse.

They went to Leghorn, visited Florence, Genoa and all the Cornici. They reached Marseilles on a morning when the north wind was blowing. Two months had elapsed since they left the "Poplars." It was now the 15th of October.

Jeanne, affected by the cold wind that seemed to come from yonder, from far-off Normandy, felt sad. Julien had, for some time, appeared changed, tired, indifferent, and she feared she knew not what.

They delayed their return home four days longer, not being able to make up their minds to leave this pleasant land of the sun. It seemed to her that she had come to an end of her happiness.

At length they left. They were to make all their purchases in Paris, prior to settling down for good at the "Poplars," and Jeanne looked forward to bringing back some treasures, thanks to her mother's present. But the first thing she thought of was the pistol promised to the little Corsican woman of Evisa.

The day after they arrived she said to Julien: "Dear, will you give me that money of mamma's? I want to make my purchases."

He turned toward her with a look of annoyance.

"How much do you want?"

"Why—whatever you please."

"I will give you a hundred francs," he replied, "but do not squander it."

She did not know what to say, amazed and confused. At length she faltered: "But—I—handed you the money to——"

He did not give her time to finish.

"Yes, of course. Whether it is in my pocket or yours makes no difference from the moment that we have the same purse. I do not refuse you, do I, since I am giving you a hundred francs?"

She took the five gold pieces without saying a word, but she did not venture to ask for any more, and she bought nothing but the pistol.

Eight days later they set out for the "Poplars."

CHAPTER VI

DISENCHANTMENT

The family and servants were awaiting them outside the white gate with brick supports. The post-chaise drew up and there were long and affectionate greetings. Little mother wept; Jeanne, affected, wiped away some tears; father

nervously walked up and down.

Then, as the baggage was being unloaded, they told of their travels beside the parlor fire. Jeanne's words flowed freely, and everything was told, everything, in a half hour, except, perhaps, a few little details forgotten in this rapid account.

The young wife then went to undo her parcels. Rosalie, also greatly affected, assisted her. When this was finished and everything had been put away, the little maid left her mistress, and Jeanne, somewhat fatigued, sat down.

She asked herself what she was now going to do, seeking some occupation for her mind, some work for her hands. She did not care to go down again into the drawing-room, where her mother was asleep, and she thought she would take a walk. But the country seemed so sad that she felt a weight at her heart on only looking out of the window.

Then it came to her that she had no longer anything to do, never again anything to do. All her young life at the convent had been preoccupied with the future, busied with dreams. The constant excitement of hope filled her hours at that time, so that she was not aware of their flight. Then hardly had she left those austere walls, where her illusions had unfolded, than her expectations of love were at once realized. The longed-for lover, met, loved and married within a few weeks, as one marries on these sudden resolves, had carried her off in his arms, without giving her time for reflection.

But now the sweet reality of the first days was to become the everyday reality, which closed the door on vague hopes, on the enchanting worries of the unknown. Yes, there was nothing more to look forward to. And there was nothing more to do, to-day, to-morrow, never. She felt all this vaguely as a certain disillusion, a certain crumbling of her dreams.

She rose and leaned her forehead against the cold window panes.

Then, after gazing for some time at the sky across which dark clouds were passing, she decided to go out.

Was this the same country, the same grass, the same trees as in May? What had become of the sunlit cheerfulness of the leaves and the poetry of the green grass, where dandelions, poppies and moon daisies bloomed and where yellow butterflies fluttered as though held by invisible wires? And this intoxication of the air teeming with life, with fragrance, with fertilizing pollen, existed no longer!

The avenues, soaked by the constant autumnal downpours, were covered with a thick carpet of fallen leaves which extended beneath the shivering bareness of the almost leafless poplars. She went as far as the shrubbery. It was as sad as the chamber of a dying person. A green hedge which separated the little winding walks was bare of leaves. Little birds flew from place to place with a little chilly cry, seeking a shelter.

The thick curtain of elm trees that formed a protection against the sea wind, the lime tree and the plane tree with their crimson and yellow tints seemed clothed, the one in red velvet and the other in yellow silk.

Jeanne walked slowly up and down petite mère's avenue, alongside the Couillards' farm. Something weighed on

her spirit like a presentiment of the long boredom of the monotonous life about to begin.

She seated herself on the bank where Julien had first told her of his love and remained there, dreaming, scarcely thinking, depressed to the very soul, longing to lie down, to sleep, in order to escape the dreariness of the day.

All at once she perceived a gull crossing the sky, carried away in a gust of wind, and she recalled the eagle she had seen down there in Corsica, in the gloomy vale of Ota. She felt a spasm at her heart as at the remembrance of something pleasant that is gone by, and she had a sudden vision of the beautiful island with its wild perfume, its sun that ripens oranges and lemons, its mountains with their rosy summits, its azure gulfs and its ravines through which the torrents flowed.

And the moist, severe landscape that surrounded her, with the falling leaves and the gray clouds blown along by the wind, enfolded her in such a heavy mantle of misery that she went back to the house to keep from sobbing.

Her mother was dozing in a torpid condition in front of the fire, accustomed to the melancholy of the long days, and not noticing it any longer. Her father and Julien had gone for a walk to talk about business matters. Night was coming on, filling the large drawing-room with gloom lighted by reflections of light from the fire.

The baron presently appeared, followed by Julien. As soon as the vicomte entered the room he rang the bell, saying: "Quick, quick, let us have some light! It is gloomy in here."

And he sat down before the fire. While his wet shoes were steaming in the warmth and the mud was drying on his soles, he rubbed his hands cheerfully as he said: "I think it is going to freeze; the sky is clearing in the north, and it is full moon to-night; we shall have a stinger to-night."

Then turning to his daughter: "Well, little one, are you glad to be back again in your own country, in your own home, with the old folks?"

This simple question upset Jeanne. She threw herself into her father's arms, her eyes full of tears, and kissed him nervously, as though asking pardon, for in spite of her honest attempt to be cheerful, she felt sad enough to give up altogether. She recalled the joy she had promised herself at seeing her parents again, and she was surprised at the coldness that seemed to numb her affection, just as if, after constantly thinking of those one loves, when at a distance and unable to see them at any moment, one should feel, on seeing them again, a sort of check of affection, until the bonds of their life in common had been renewed.

Dinner lasted a long time. No one spoke much. Julien appeared to have forgotten his wife.

In the drawing-room Jeanne sat before the fire in a drowsy condition, opposite little mother, who was sound asleep. Aroused by the voices of the men, Jeanne asked herself, as she tried to rouse herself, if she, too, was going to become a slave to this dreary lethargy of habit that nothing varies.

The baron approached the fire, and holding out his hands to the glowing flame, he said, smiling: "Ah, that burns finely this evening. It is freezing, children; it is freezing." Then, placing his hand on Jeanne's shoulder and

pointing to the fire, he said: "See here, little daughter, that is the best thing in life, the hearth, the hearth, with one's own around one. Nothing else counts. But supposing we retire. You children must be tired out."

When she was in her room, Jeanne asked herself how she could feel so differently on returning a second time to the place that she thought she loved. Why did she feel as though she were wounded? Why did this house, this beloved country, all that hitherto had thrilled her with happiness, now appear so distressing?

Her eyes suddenly fell on her clock. The little bee was still swinging from left to right and from right to left with the same quick, continuous motion above the scarlet blossoms. All at once an impulse of tenderness moved her to tears at sight of this little piece of mechanism that seemed to be alive. She had not been so affected on kissing her father and mother. The heart has mysteries that no arguments can solve.

For the first time since her marriage she was alone, Julien, under pretext of fatigue, having taken another room.

She lay awake a long time, unaccustomed to being alone and disturbed by the bleak north wind which beat against the roof.

She was awakened the next morning by a bright light that flooded her room. She put on a dressing gown and ran to the window and opened it.

An icy breeze, sharp and bracing, streamed into the room, making her skin tingle and her eyes water. The sun appeared behind the trees on a crimson sky, and the earth, covered with frost and dry and hard, rang out beneath one's footsteps. In one night all the leaves had blown off the trees, and in the distance beyond the level ground was seen the long green line of water, covered with trails of white foam.

Jeanne dressed herself and went out, and for the sake of an object she went to call on the farmers.

The Martins held up their hands in surprise, and Mrs. Martin kissed her on both cheeks, and then they made her drink a glass of noyau. She then went to the other farm. The Couillards also were surprised. Mrs. Couillard pecked her on the ears and she had to drink a glass of cassis. Then she went home to breakfast.

The day went by like the previous day, cold instead of damp. And the other days of the week resembled these two days, and all the weeks of the month were like the first week.

Little by little, however, she ceased to regret far-off lands. The force of habit was covering her life with a layer of resignation similar to the limestone formation deposited on objects by certain springs. And a kind of interest for the thousand-and-one little insignificant things of daily life, a care for the simple, ordinary everyday occupations, awakened in her heart. A sort of pensive melancholy, a vague disenchantment with life was growing up in her mind. What did she lack? What did she want? She did not know. She had no worldly desires, no thirst for amusement, no longing for permissible pleasures. What then? Just as old furniture tarnishes in time, so everything was slowly becoming faded to her eyes, everything seemed to be fading, to be taking on pale, dreary shades.

Her relations with Julien had completely changed. He seemed to be quite different since they came back from their honeymoon, like an actor who has played his part and resumes his ordinary manner. He scarcely paid any attention to her or even spoke to her. All trace of love had suddenly disappeared, and he seldom came into her room at night.

He had taken charge of the money and of the house, changed the leases, worried the peasants, cut down expenses, and having adopted the costume of a gentleman farmer, he had lost his polish and elegance as a fiancé.

He always wore the same suit, although it was covered with spots. It was an old velveteen shooting jacket with brass buttons, that he had found among his former wardrobe, and with the carelessness that is frequent with those who no longer seek to please, he had given up shaving, and his long beard, badly cut, made an incredible change for the worse in his appearance. His hands were never cared for, and after each meal he drank four or five glasses of brandy.

Jeanne tried to remonstrate with him gently, but he had answered her so abruptly: "Won't you let me alone!" that she never ventured to give him any more advice.

She had adapted herself to these changes in a manner that surprised herself. He had become a stranger to her, a stranger whose mind and heart were closed to her. She constantly thought about it, asking herself how it was that after having met, loved, married in an impulse of affection, they should all at once find themselves almost as much strangers as though they had never shared the same room.

And how was it that she did not feel this neglect more deeply? Was this life? Had they deceived themselves? Did the future hold nothing further for her?

If Julien had remained handsome, carefully dressed, elegant, she might possibly have suffered more deeply.

It had been agreed that after the new year the young couple should remain alone and that the father and mother should go back to spend a few months at their house in Rouen. The young people were not to leave the "Poplars" that winter, so as to get thoroughly settled and to become accustomed to each other and to the place where all their life would be passed. They had a few neighbors to whom Julien would introduce his wife. These were the Briseville, the Colteliers and the Fourvilles.

But the young people could not begin to pay calls because they had not as yet been able to get a painter to alter the armorial bearings on the carriage.

The old family coach had been given up to his son-in-law by the baron, and nothing would have induced him to show himself at the neighboring châteaux if the coat-of-arms of the De Lamares were not quartered with those of the Le Perthuis des Vauds.

There was only one man in the district who made a specialty of heraldic designs, a painter of Bolbec, called Bataille, who was in demand at all the Norman castles in turn to make these precious designs on the doors of carriages.

At length one morning in December, just as they were finishing breakfast, they saw an individual open the gate

and walk toward the house. He was carrying a box on his back. This was Bataille.

They offered him some breakfast, and, while he was eating, the baron and Julien made sketches of quarterings. The baroness, all upset as soon as these things were discussed, gave her opinion. And even Jeanne took part in the discussion, as though some mysterious interest had suddenly awakened in her.

Bataille, while eating, gave his ideas, at times taking the pencil and tracing a design, citing examples, describing all the aristocratic carriages in the countryside, and seemed to have brought with him in his ideas, even in his voice, a sort of atmosphere of aristocracy.

As soon as he had finished his coffee, they all went to the coach house. They took off the cover of the carriage and Bataille examined it. He then gravely give his views as to the size he considered suitable for the design, and after an exchange of ideas, he set to work.

Notwithstanding the cold, the baroness had her chair brought out so as to watch him working, and then her footstove, for her feet were freezing. She then began to chat with the painter, on all the recent births, deaths and marriages of which she had not heard, thus adding to the genealogical tree which she carried in her memory.

Julien sat beside her, astride on a chair. He was smoking, spitting on the ground, listening and following with his glances the emblazoning of his rank.

Presently old Simon, who was on his way to the vegetable garden, his spade on his shoulder, stopped to look at the work; and as Bataille's arrival had become known at the two farms, the farmers' wives soon put in an appearance. They went into raptures, standing one at either side of the baroness, exclaiming: "My! it requires some cleverness all the same to fix up those things."

The two doors could not be finished before the next day about eleven o'clock. Every one was on hand; and they dragged the carriage outside so as to get a better view of it.

It was perfect. Bataille was complimented, and went off with his box on his back. They all agreed that the painter had great ability, and if circumstances had been favorable would doubtless have been a great artist.

Julien, by way of economy, had introduced great reforms which necessitated making some changes. The old coachman had been made gardener, Julien undertaking to drive himself, having sold the carriage horses to avoid buying feed for them. But as it was necessary to have some one to hold the horses when he and his wife got out of the carriage, he had made a little cow tender named Marius into a groom. Then in order to get some horses, he introduced a special clause into the Couillards' and Martins' leases, by which they were bound to supply a horse each, on a certain day every month, the date to be fixed by him; and this would exempt them from their tribute of poultry.

So the Couillards brought a big yellow horse, and the Martins a small white animal with long, unclipped coat, and the two were harnessed up together. Marius, buried in an old livery belonging to old Simon, led the carriage up to the front door.

Julien, looking clean and brushed up, looked a little like his former self; but

his long beard gave him a common look in spite of all. He looked over the horses, the carriage, and the little groom, and seemed satisfied, the only really important thing to him being the newly painted escutcheon.

The baroness came down leaning on her husband's arm and got into the carriage. Then Jeanne appeared. She began to laugh at the horses, saying that the white one was the son of the yellow horse; then, perceiving Marius, his face buried under his hat with its cockade, his nose alone preventing it from covering his face altogether, his hands hidden in his long sleeves, and the tail of his coat forming a skirt round his legs, his feet encased in immense shoes showing in a comical manner beneath it, and then when he threw his head back so as to see, and lifted up his leg to walk as if he were crossing a river, she burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

The baron turned round, glanced at the little bewildered groom and he, too, burst out laughing, calling to his wife: "Look at Ma-Ma-Marius! Is he not comical? Heavens, how funny he looks!"

The baroness, looking out of the carriage window, was also convulsed, so that the carriage shook on its springs.

But Julien, pale with anger, asked: "What makes you laugh like that? Are you crazy?"

Jeanne, quite convulsed and unable to stop laughing, sat down on the doorstep; the baron did the same, while, in the carriage, spasmodic sneezes, a sort of constant chuckling, told that the baroness was choking. Presently there was a motion beneath Marius' livery. He had, doubtless, understood the joke, for he was shaking with laughter beneath his hat.

Julien darted forward in exasperation. With a box on the ear he sent the boy's hat flying across the lawn; then, turning toward his father-in-law, he stammered in a voice trembling with rage: "It seems to me that you should be the last to laugh. We should not be where we are now if you had not wasted your money and ruined your property. Whose fault is it if you are ruined?"

The laughter ceased at once, and no one spoke. Jeanne, now ready to cry, got into the carriage and sat beside her mother. The baron, silent and astonished, took his place opposite the two ladies, and Julien sat on the box after lifting to the seat beside him the weeping boy, whose face was beginning to swell.

The road was dreary and appeared long. The occupants of the carriage were silent. All three sad and embarrassed, they would not acknowledge to one another what was occupying their thoughts. They felt that they could not talk on indifferent subjects while these thoughts had possession of them, and preferred to remain silent than to allude to this painful subject.

They drove past farmyards, the carriage jogging along unevenly with the ill-matched animals, putting to flight terrified black hens who plunged into the bushes and disappeared, occasionally followed by a barking wolf-hound.

At length they entered a wide avenue of pine trees, at the end of which was a white, closed gate. Marius ran to open it, and they drove in round an immense grass plot, and drew up before a high, spacious, sad-looking building with closed shutters.

The hall door opened abruptly, and an old, paralyzed servant wearing a black waistcoat with red stripes partially covered by his working apron slowly descended the slanting steps. He took the visitors' names and led them into an immense reception room, and opened with difficulty the Venetian blinds which were always kept closed. The furniture had covers on it, and the clock and candelabra were wrapped in white muslin. An atmosphere of mildew, an atmosphere of former days, damp and icy, seemed to permeate one's lungs, heart and skin with melancholy.

They all sat down and waited. They heard steps in the hall above them that betokened unaccustomed haste. The hosts were hurriedly dressing. The baroness, who was chilled, sneezed constantly. Julien paced up and down. Jeanne, despondent, sat beside her mother. The baron leaned against the marble mantelpiece with his head bent down.

Finally, one of the tall doors opened, and the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Briseville appeared. They were both small, thin, vivacious, of no age in particular, ceremonious and embarrassed.

After the first greetings, there seemed to be nothing to say. So they began to congratulate each other for no special reason, and hoped that these friendly relations would be kept up. It was a treat to see people when one lived in the country the year round.

The icy atmosphere pierced to their bones and made their voices hoarse. The baroness was coughing now, and had stopped sneezing. The baron thought it was time to leave. The Brisevilles said: "What, so soon? Stay a little longer." But Jeanne had risen in spite of Julien's signals, for he thought the visit too short.

They attempted to ring for the servant to order the carriage to the door, but the bell would not ring. The host started out himself to attend to it, but found that the horses had been put in the stable.

They had to wait. Every one tried to think of something to say. Jeanne, involuntarily shivering with cold, inquired what their hosts did to occupy themselves all the year round. The Brisevilles were much astonished; for they were always busy, either writing letters to their aristocratic relations, of whom they had a number scattered all over France, or attending to microscopic duties, as ceremonious to one another as though they were strangers, and talking grandiloquently of the most insignificant matters.

At last the carriage passed the windows with its ill-matched team. But Marius had disappeared. Thinking he was off duty until evening, he had doubtless gone for a walk.

Julien, perfectly furious, begged them to send him home on foot, and after a great many farewells on both sides, they set out for the "Poplars."

As soon as they were inside the carriage, Jeanne and her father, in spite of Julien's brutal behavior of the morning which still weighed on their minds, began to laugh at the gestures and intonations of the Brisevilles. The baron imitated the husband, and Jeanne the wife. But the baroness, a little touchy in these particulars, said: "You are wrong to ridicule them thus; they are people of excellent family." They were silent out of respect for little mother,

but nevertheless, from time to time, Jeanne and her father began again. The baroness could not forbear smiling in her turn, but she repeated: "It is not nice to laugh at people who belong to our class."

Suddenly the carriage stopped, and Julien called out to someone behind it. Then Jeanne and the baron, leaning out, saw a singular creature that appeared to be rolling along towards them. His legs entangled in his flowing coat-tails, and blinded by his hat which kept falling over his face, shaking his sleeves like the sails of a windmill, and splashing into puddles of water, and stumbling against stones in the road, running and bounding, Marius was following the carriage as fast as his legs could carry him.

As soon as he caught up with it, Julien, leaning over, seized him by the collar of his coat, sat him down beside him, and letting go the reins, began to shower blows on the boy's hat, which sank down to his shoulders with the reverberations of a drum. The boy screamed, tried to get away, to jump from the carriage, while his master, holding him with one hand, continued beating him with the other.

Jeanne, dumfounded, stammered: "Father—oh, father!" And the baroness, wild with indignation, squeezed her husband's arm. "Stop him, Jack!" she exclaimed. The baron quickly lowered the front window, and seizing hold of his son-in-law's sleeve, he sputtered out in a voice trembling with rage: "Have you almost finished beating that child?"

Julien turned round in astonishment: "Don't you see what a condition his livery is in?"

But the baron, placing his head between them, said: "Well, what do I care? There is no need to be brutal like that!"

Julien got angry again: "Let me alone, please; this is not your affair!" And he was raising his hand again when his father-in-law caught hold of it and dragged it down so roughly that he knocked it against the wood of the seat, and he roared at him so loud: "If you do not stop, I shall get out and I will see that you stop it, myself," that Julien calmed down at once, and shrugging his shoulders without replying, he whipped up the horses, who set out at a quick trot.

The two women, pale as death, did not stir, and one could hear distinctly the thumping of the baroness' heart.

At dinner Julien was more charming than usual, as though nothing had occurred. Jeanne, her father, and Madame Adelaide, pleased to see him so amiable, fell in with his mood, and when Jeanne mentioned the Brisevilles, he laughed at them himself, adding, however: "All the same, they have the grand air."

They made no more visits, each one fearing to revive the Marius episode. They decided to send New Year's cards, and to wait until the first warm days of spring before paying any more calls.

At Christmas they invited the curé, the mayor and his wife to dinner, and again on New Year's Day. These were the only events that varied the monotony of their life. The baron and his wife were to leave "The Poplars" on the ninth of January. Jeanne wanted to keep them, but Julien did not acquiesce, and the baron sent for a post-chaise from Rouen, seeing his son-in-law's coolness.

The day before their departure, as it was a clear frost, Jeanne and her father

decided to go to Yport, which they had not visited since her return from Corsica. They crossed the wood where she had strolled on her wedding-day, all wrapped up in the one whose lifelong companion she had become; the wood where she had received her first kiss, trembled at the first breath of love, had a presentiment of that sensual love of which she did not become aware until she was in the wild vale of Ota beside the spring where they mingled their kisses as they drank of its waters. The trees were now leafless, the climbing vines dead.

They entered the little village. The empty, silent streets smelled of the sea, of wrack, of fish. Huge brown nets were still hanging up to dry outside the houses, or stretched out on the shingle. The gray, cold sea, with its eternal roaring foam, was going out, uncovering the green rocks at the foot of the cliff toward Fécamp.

Jeanne and her father, motionless, watched the fishermen setting out in their boats in the dusk, as they did every night, risking their lives to keep from starving, and so poor, nevertheless, that they never tasted meat.

The baron, inspired at the sight of the ocean, murmured: "It is terrible, but it is beautiful. How magnificent this sea is on which the darkness is falling, and on which so many lives are in peril, is it not, Jeannette?"

She replied with a cold smile: "It is nothing to the Mediterranean."

Her father, indignant, exclaimed: "The Mediterranean! It is oil, sugar water, bluing water in a washtub. Look at this sea, how terrible it is with its crests of foam! And think of all those men who have set out on it, and who are already out of sight."

Jeanne assented with a sigh: "Yes, if you think so." But this name, "Mediterranean," had wrung her heart afresh, sending her thoughts back to those distant lands where her dreams lay buried.

Instead of returning home by the woods, they walked along the road, mounting the ascent slowly. They were silent, sad at the thought of the approaching separation. As they passed along beside the farmyards an odor of crushed apples, that smell of new cider which seems to pervade the atmosphere in this season all through Normandy, rose to their nostrils, or else a strong smell of the cow stables. A small lighted window at the end of the yard indicated the farmhouse.

It seemed to Jeanne that her mind was expanding, was beginning to understand the psychic meaning of things; and these little scattered gleams in the landscape gave her, all at once, a keen sense of the isolation of all human lives, a feeling that everything detaches, separates, draws one far away from the things they love.

She said, in a resigned tone: "Life is not always cheerful."

The baron sighed: "How can it be helped, daughter? We can do nothing."

The following day the baron and his wife went away, and Jeanne and Julien were left alone.

CHAPTER VII

JEANNE'S DISCOVERY

Cards now became a distraction in the life of the young people. Every morning after breakfast, Julien would play several games of bezique with his wife, smoking and sipping brandy as he played. She would then go up to her room and sit down beside the window, and as the rain beat against the panes, or the wind shook the windows, she would embroider away steadily. Occasionally she would raise her eyes and look out at the gray sea which had white-caps on it. Then, after gazing listlessly for some time, she would resume her work.

She had nothing else to do, Julien having taken the entire management of the house, to satisfy his craving for authority and his craze for economy. He was parsimonious in the extreme, never gave any tips, cut down the food to the merest necessaries; and as Jeanne since her return had ordered the baker to make her a little Norman "galette" for breakfast, he had cut down this extra expense, and condemned her to eat toast.

She said nothing in order to avoid recriminations, arguments and quarrels; but she suffered keenly at each fresh manifestation of avarice on the part of her husband. It appeared to her low and odious, brought up as she had been in a family where money was never considered. How often had she not heard her mother say: "Why, money is made to be spent." Julien would now say: "Will you never become accustomed to not throwing money away?" And each time he deducted a few sous from some one's salary or on a note, he would say with a smile, as he slipped the change into his pocket: "Little streams make big rivers."

On certain days Jeanne would sit and dream. She would gradually cease sewing and, with her hands idle, and forgetting her surroundings, she would weave one of those romances of her girlhood and be lost in some enchanting adventure. But suddenly Julien's voice giving some orders to old Simon would snatch her abruptly from her dreams, and she would take up her work again, saying: "That is all over," and a tear would fall on her hands as she plied the needle.

Rosalie, formerly so cheerful and always singing, had changed. Her rounded cheeks had lost their color, and were now almost hollow, and sometimes had an earthy hue. Jeanne would frequently ask her: "Are you ill, my girl?" The little maid would reply: "No, madame," while her cheeks would redden slightly and she would retire hastily.

At the end of January the snow came. In one night the whole plain was covered and the trees next morning were white with icy foam.

On one of these mornings, Jeanne was sitting warming her feet before the fire in her room, while Rosalie, who had changed from day to day, was making the bed. Suddenly hearing behind her a kind of moan, Jeanne asked, without turning her head: "What is the matter?"

The maid replied as usual: "Nothing, madame"; but her voice was weak and trembling.

Jeanne's thoughts were on something else, when she noticed that the girl was not moving about the room. She called: "Rosalie!" Still no sound. Then, thinking she might have left the room, she cried in a louder tone: "Rosalie!" and she was reaching out her arm to ring the bell, when a deep moan close beside her made her start up with a shudder.

The little servant, her face livid, her eyes haggard, was seated on the floor, her legs stretched out, and her back leaning against the bed. Jeanne sprang toward her. "What is the matter with you—what is the matter?" she asked.

The girl did not reply, did not move. She stared vacantly at her mistress and gasped as though she were in terrible pain. Then, suddenly, she slid down on her back at full length, clenching her teeth to smother a cry of anguish.

Jeanne suddenly understood, and almost distracted, she ran to the head of the stairs, crying: "Julien, Julien!"

"What do you want?" he replied from below.

She hardly knew how to tell him. "It is Rosalie, who——"

Julien rushed upstairs two steps at a time, and going abruptly into the room, he found the poor girl had just been delivered of a child. He looked round with a wicked look on his face, and pushing his terrified wife out of the room, exclaimed: "This is none of your affair. Go away. Send me Ludivine and old Simon."

Jeanne, trembling, descended to the kitchen, and then, not daring to go upstairs again, she went into the drawing-room, in which there had been no fire since her parents left, and anxiously awaited news.

She presently saw the man-servant running out of the house. Five minutes later he returned with Widow Dentu, the nurse of the district.

Then there was a great commotion on the stairs as though they were carrying a wounded person, and Julien came in and told Jeanne that she might go back to her room.

She trembled as if she had witnessed some terrible accident. She sat down again before the fire, and asked: "How is she?"

Julien, preoccupied and nervous, was pacing up and down the room. He seemed to be getting angry, and did not reply at first. Then he stopped and said: "What do you intend to do with this girl?"

She did not understand, and looked at her husband. "Why, what do you mean? I do not know."

Then suddenly flying into a rage, he exclaimed: "We cannot keep a bastard in the house."

Jeanne was very much bewildered, and said at the end of a long silence: "But, my friend, perhaps we could put it out to nurse?"

He cut her short: "And who will pay the bill? You will, no doubt."

She reflected for some time, trying to find some way out of the difficulty; at length she said: "Why, the father will take care of it, of the child; and if he marries Rosalie, there will be no more difficulty."

Julien, as though his patience were exhausted, replied furiously: "The father!—the father!—do you know him—the father? No, is it not so? Well then——?"

Jeanne, much affected, became excited: "But you certainly would not let the girl go away like that. It would be cowardly! We will inquire the name of the man, and we will go and find him, and he will have to explain matters."

Julien had calmed down and resumed his pacing up and down. "My dear," he said, "she will not tell the name of the man; she will not tell you any more than she will tell me—and, if he does not want her? . . . We cannot, however, keep a woman and her illegitimate child under our roof, don't you understand?"

Jeanne, persistent, replied: "Then he must be a wretch, this man. But we must certainly find out who it is, and then he will have us to deal with."

Julien, colored, became annoyed again, and said: "But—meanwhile—?"

She did not know what course to take, and asked: "What do you propose?"

"Oh, I? That's very simple. I would give her some money and send her to the devil with her brat."

The young wife, indignant, was disgusted with him. "That shall never be," she said. "She is my foster-sister, that girl; we grew up together. She has made a mistake, so much the worse; but I will not cast her out of doors on that account; and, if it is necessary, I will bring up the child."

Then Julien's wrath exploded: "And we should earn a fine reputation, we, with our name and our position! And they would say of us everywhere that we were protecting vice, harboring beggars; and decent people would never set their foot inside our doors. What are you thinking of? You must be crazy!"

She had remained quite calm. "I shall never cast off Rosalie; and if you do not wish her to stay, my mother will take her; and we shall surely succeed in finding out the name of the father of the child."

He left the room in exasperation, banging the door after him and exclaiming: "What stupid ideas women have!"

In the afternoon Jeanne went up to see the patient. The little maid, watched over by Widow Dentu, was lying still in her bed, her eyes wide open, while the nurse held the new-born babe in her arms.

As soon as Rosalie perceived her mistress, she began to sob, hiding her face in the covers and shaking with her sorrow. Jeanne wanted to kiss her, but she avoided it by keeping her face covered. But the nurse interfered, and drawing away the sheet, uncovered her face, and she let Jeanne kiss her, weeping still, but more quietly.

A meagre fire was burning in the grate; the room was cold; the child was crying. Jeanne did not dare to speak of the little one, for fear of another attack, and she took her maid's hand as she said mechanically: "It will not matter, it will not matter." The poor girl glanced furtively at the nurse, and trembled as the infant cried, and the remembrance of her sorrow came to her mind occasionally in a convulsive sob, while suppressed tears choked her.

Jeanne kissed her again, and murmured softly in her ear: "We will take good care of it, never fear, my girl." Then as she was beginning to cry again, Jeanne made her escape.

She came to see her every day, and each time Rosalie burst into tears at the sight of her mistress.

The child was put out to nurse at a neighbor's.

Julien, however, hardly spoke to his wife, as though he had nourished anger against her ever since she refused to send away the maid. He referred to the subject one day, but Jeanne took from her pocket a letter from the baroness asking them to send the girl to them at once if they would not keep her at the "Poplars." Julien, furious, cried: "Your mother is as foolish as you are!" but he did not insist any more.

Two weeks later the patient was able to get up and take up her work again.

One morning, Jeanne made her sit down and, taking her hands and looking steadfastly at her, she said:

"See here, my girl, tell me everything."

Rosalie began to tremble, and faltered:

"What, madame?"

"Whose is it, this child?"

The little maid was overcome with confusion, and she sought wildly to withdraw her hands so as to hide her face. But Jeanne kissed her in spite of herself, and consoled her, saying: "It is a misfortune, but cannot be helped, my girl. You were weak, but that happens to many others. If the father marries you, no one will think of it again."

Rosalie sighed as if she were suffering, and from time to time made an effort to disengage herself and run away.

Jeanne resumed: "I understand perfectly that you are ashamed; but you see that I am not angry, that I speak kindly to you. If I ask you the name of the man it is for your own good, for I feel from your grief that he has deserted you, and because I wish to prevent that. Julien will go and look for him, you see, and we will oblige him to marry you; and as we will employ you both, we will oblige him also to make you happy."

This time Rosalie gave such a jerk that she snatched her hands away from her mistress and ran off as if she were mad.

That evening at dinner Jeanne said to Julien: "I tried to persuade Rosalie to tell me the name of her betrayer. I did not succeed. You try to find out so that we can compel this miserable man to marry her."

But Julien became angry: "Oh! you know I do not wish to hear anything about it. You wish to keep this girl. Keep her, but do not bother me about her."

Since the girl's illness he appeared to be more irritable than ever; and he had got into the way of never speaking to his wife without shouting as if he were in a rage, while she, on the contrary, would lower her voice, be gentle and conciliating, to avoid all argument; but she often wept at night after she went to bed.

In spite of his constant irritability, her husband had become more affectionate than customary since their return.

Rosalie was soon quite well and less sad, although she appeared terrified, pursued by some unknown fear, and she ran away twice when Jeanne tried to question her again.

Julien all at once became more amiable, and the young wife, clinging to vain hopes, also became more cheerful. The thaw had not yet set in and a hard, smooth, glittering covering of snow extended over the landscape. Neither men nor animals were to be seen; only the

chimneys of the cottages gave evidence of life in the smoke that ascended from them into the icy air.

One evening the thermometer fell still lower, and Julien, shivering as he left the table—for the dining-room was never properly heated, he was so economical with the wood—rubbed his hands, murmuring: "It will be warmer to-night, won't it, my dear?" He laughed with his jolly laugh of former days, and Jeanne threw her arms around his neck: "I do not feel well, dear; perhaps I shall be better to-morrow."

"As you wish, my dear. If you are ill you must take care of yourself." and they began to talk of other things.

She retired early. Julien, for a wonder, had a fire lighted in her room. As soon as he saw that it was burning brightly, he kissed his wife on the forehead and left the room.

The whole house seemed to be penetrated by the cold; the very walls seemed to be shivering, and Jeanne shivered in her bed. Twice she got up to put fresh logs on the fire and to look for dresses, skirts, and other garments which she piled on the bed. Nothing seemed to warm her; her feet were numbed and her lower limbs seemed to tingle, making her excessively nervous and restless.

Then her teeth began to chatter, her hands shook, there was a tightness in her chest, her heart began to beat with hard, dull pulsations, and at times seemed to stop beating, and she gasped for breath.

A terrible apprehension seized her, while the cold seemed to penetrate to her marrow. She never had felt such a sensation, she had never seemed to lose her hold on life like this before, never been so near her last breath.

"I am going to die," she thought, "I am dying——"

And filled with terror, she jumped out of bed, rang for Rosalie, waited, rang again, waited again, shivering and frozen.

The little maid did not come. She was doubtless asleep, that first, sound sleep that nothing can disturb. Jeanne, in despair, darted toward the stairs in her bare feet, and groping her way, she ascended the staircase quietly, found the door, opened it, and called, "Rosalie!" She went forward, stumbled against the bed, felt all over it with her hands and found that it was empty. It was empty and cold, and as if no one had slept there. Much surprised, she said: "What! Has she gone out in weather like this?"

But as her heart began to beat tumultuously till she seemed to be suffocating, she went downstairs again with trembling limbs in order to wake Julien. She rushed into his room filled with the idea that she was going to die, and longing to see him before she lost consciousness.

By the light of the dying embers she perceived Rosalie's head leaning on her husband's shoulder.

At the cry she gave they both started to their feet; she stood motionless for a second, horrified at this discovery, and then fled to her room; and when Julien, at his wit's end, called "Jeanne!" she was seized with an overmastering terror of seeing him, of hearing his voice, of listening to him explaining, lying, of meeting his gaze; and she darted toward the stairs again and went down.

She now ran along in the darkness, at the risk of falling downstairs, at the

risk of breaking her neck on the stone floor of the hall. She rushed along, impelled by an imperious desire to flee, to know nothing about it, to see no one.

When she was at the bottom of the stairs she sat down on one of the steps, still in her nightdress, and in bare feet, and remained in a dazed condition. She heard Julien moving and walking about. She started to her feet in order to escape him. He was starting to come downstairs and called: "Listen, Jeanne!"

No, she would not listen nor let him touch her with the tips of his fingers; and she darted into the dining-room as if she were fleeing from an assassin. She looked for a door of escape, a hiding place, a dark corner, some way of avoiding him. She hid under the table. But he was already at the door, a candle in his hand, still calling: "Jeanne!" She started off again like a hare, darted into the kitchen, ran round it twice like a trapped animal, and as he came near her, she suddenly opened the door into the garden and darted out into the night.

The contact with the snow, into which she occasionally sank up to her knees, seemed to give her the energy of despair. She did not feel cold, although she had little on. She felt nothing, her body was so numbed from the emotion of her mind, and she ran along as white as the snow.

She followed the large avenue, crossed the wood, crossed the ditch, and started off across the plain.

There was no moon, the stars were shining like sparks of fire in the black sky; but the plain was light with a dull whiteness, and lay in infinite silence.

Jeanne walked quickly, hardly breathing, not knowing, not thinking of anything. She suddenly stopped on the edge of the cliff. She stopped short, instinctively, and crouched down, bereft of thought and of will power.

In the abyss before her the silent, invisible sea exhaled the salt odor of its wrack at low tide.

She remained thus some time, her mind as inert as her body; then, all at once, she began to tremble, to tremble violently, like a sail shaken by the wind. Her arms, her hands, her feet, impelled by an invisible force, throbbed, pulsated wildly, and her consciousness awakened abruptly, sharp and poignant.

Old memories passed before her mental vision: the sail with him in Père Lastique's boat, their conversation, his nascent love, the christening of the boat; then she went back, further back, to that night of dreams when she first came to the "Poplars." And now! *And now!* Oh, her life was shipwrecked, all joy was ended, all expectation at an end; and the frightful future full of torture, of deception, and of despair appeared before her. Better to die, it would all be over at once.

But a voice cried in the distance: "Here it is, here are her steps; quick, quick, this way!" It was Julien who was looking for her.

Oh! she did not wish to see him again. In the abyss down yonder before her she now heard a slight sound, the indistinct ripple of the waves over the rocks. She rose to her feet with the idea of throwing herself over the cliff and bidding life farewell. Like one in despair, she uttered the last word of the dying, the last word of the young soldier slain in battle: "Mother!"

All at once the thought of little

mother came to her mind, she saw her sobbing, she saw her father on his knees before her mangled remains, and in a second she felt all the pain of their sorrow.

She sank down again into the snow; and when Julien and old Simon, followed by Marius, carrying a lantern, seized her arm to pull her back as she was so close to the brink, she made no attempt to escape.

She let them do as they would, for she could not stir. She felt that they were carrying her, and then that she was being put to bed and rubbed with hot cloths; then she became unconscious.

Then she had a nightmare, or was it a nightmare? She was in bed. It was broad daylight, but she could not get up. Why? She did not know. Then she heard a little noise on the floor, a sort of scratching, a rustling, and suddenly a mouse, a little gray mouse, ran quickly across the sheet. Another followed it, then a third, who ran toward her chest with his little, quick scamper. Jeanne was not afraid, and she reached out her hand to catch the animal, but could not catch it. Then other mice, ten, twenty, hundreds, thousands, rose up on all sides of her. They climbed the bedposts, ran up the tapestries, covered the bed completely. And soon they got beneath the covers; Jeanne felt them gliding over her skin, tickling her limbs, running up and down her body. She saw them running from the bottom of the bed to get into her neck under the sheets; and she tried to fight them off, throwing her hands out to try and catch them, but always finding them empty.

She was frantic, wanted to escape, screamed, and it seemed as if she were being held down, as if strong arms enfolded her and rendered her helpless; but she saw no one.

She had no idea of time. It must have been long, a very long time.

Then she awoke, weary, aching, but quiet. She felt weak, very weak. She opened her eyes and was not surprised to see little mother seated in her room with a man whom she did not know.

How old was she? She did not know, and thought she was a very little girl. She had no recollection of anything.

The big man said: "Why, she has regained consciousness." Little mother began to weep. Then the big man resumed: "Come, be calm, baroness; I can ensure her recovery now. But do not talk to her at all. Let her sleep, let her sleep."

Then it seemed to Jeanne that she remained in a state of exhaustion for a long time, overcome by the heavy sleep as soon as she tried to think; and she tried not to remember anything whatever, as though she had a vague fear that the reality might come back to her.

Once when she awoke she saw Julien, alone, standing beside her; and suddenly it all came back to her, as if the curtain which hid her past life had been raised.

She felt a horrible pain in her heart, and wanted to escape once more. She threw back the coverlets, jumped to the floor and fell down, her limbs being too weak to support her.

Julien sprang toward her, and she began to scream for him not to touch her. She writhed and rolled on the floor. The door opened. Aunt Lison came running in with Widow Dentu, then the baron, and finally little mother, puffing and distracted.

They put her back into bed, and she immediately closed her eyes, so as to

escape talking and be able to think quietly.

Her mother and aunt watched over her anxiously, saying: "Do you hear us now, Jeanne, my little Jeanne?"

She pretended to be deaf, not to hear them, and did not answer. Night came on and the nurse took up her position beside the bed. She did not sleep; she kept trying to think of things that had escaped her memory as though there were holes in it, great white empty places where events had not been noted down.

Little by little she began to recall the facts, and she pondered over them steadily.

Little mother, Aunt Lison, the baron had come, so she must have been very ill. But Julien? What had he said? Did her parents know? And Rosalie, where was she? And what should she do? What should she do? An idea came to her—she would return to Rouen and live with father and little mother as in old days. She would be a widow; that's all.

Then she waited, listening to what was being said around her, understanding everything without letting them see it, rejoiced at her returning reason, patient and crafty.

That evening, at last, she found herself alone with the baroness and called to her in a low tone: "Little Mother!" Her own voice astonished her, it seemed strange. The baroness seized her hands: "My daughter, my darling Jeanne! My child, do you recognize me?"

"Yes, little mother, but you must not weep; we have a great deal to talk about. Did Julien tell you why I ran away in the snow?"

"Yes, my darling, you had a very dangerous fever."

"It was not that, mamma. I had the fever afterward; but did he tell you what gave me the fever and why I ran away?"

"No, my dearie."

"It was because I found Rosalie in his room."

Her mother thought she was delirious again and soothed her, saying: "Go to sleep, darling, calm yourself, try to sleep."

But Jeanne, persistent, continued: "I am quite sensible now, little mother. I am not talking wildly as I must have done these last days. I felt ill one night and I went to look for Julien. Rosalie was with him in his room. I did not know what I was doing, for sorrow, and I ran out into the snow to throw myself off the cliff."

But the baroness reiterated, "Yes, darling, you have been very ill, very ill."

"It is not that, mamma. I found Rosalie in with Julien, and I will not live with him any longer. You will take me back with you to Rouen to live as we used to do."

The baroness, whom the doctor had warned not to thwart Jeanne in any way, replied: "Yes, my darling."

But the invalid grew impatient: "I see that you do not believe me. Go and fetch little father, he will soon understand."

The baroness left the room and presently returned, leaning on her husband's arm. They sat down beside the bed and Jeanne began to talk, She told them all, quietly, in a weak voice, but clearly; all about Julien's peculiar character, his harshness, his avarice, and, finally, his infidelity.

When she had finished, the baron saw

that she was not delirious, but he did not know what to think, what to determine, or what to answer. He took her hand, tenderly, as he used to do when he put her to sleep with stories, and said: "Listen, dearie, we must act with prudence. We must do nothing rash. Try to put up with your husband until we can come to some decision—promise me this?"

"I will try, but I will not stay here after I get well," she replied.

Then she added in a lower tone: "Where is Rosalie now?"

"You will not see her any more," replied the baron. But she persisted: "Where is she? I wish to know." Then he confessed that she had not left the house, but declared that she was going to leave.

On leaving the room the baron, filled with indignation and wounded in his feelings as a father, went to look for Julien, and said to him abruptly: "Sir, I have come to ask you for an explanation of your conduct toward my daughter. You have been unfaithful to her with your maid, which is a double insult."

Julien pretended to be innocent, denied everything positively, swore, took God as his witness. What proof had they? he asked. Was not Jeanne delirious? Had she not had brain fever? Had she not run out in the snow, in an attack of delirium, at the very beginning of her illness? And it was just at this time, when she was running about the house almost naked, that she pretends that she saw her maid in her husband's room!

And he grew angry, threatened a lawsuit, became furious. The baron, bewildered, made excuses, begged his pardon, and held out his loyal hand to Julien, who refused to take it.

When Jeanne heard what her husband had said, she did not show any annoyance, but replied: "He is lying, papa, but we shall end by convicting him."

For some days she remained taciturn and reserved, thinking over matters. The third morning she asked to see Rosalie. The baron refused to send her up, saying she had left. Jeanne persisted, saying: "Well, let some one go and fetch her."

She was beginning to get excited when the doctor came. They told him everything, so that he could form an opinion. But Jeanne suddenly burst into tears, her nerves all unstrung, and almost screamed: "I want Rosalie; I wish to see her!"

The doctor took hold of her hand and said in a low tone: "Calm yourself, madame; any emotion may lead to serious consequences, for you are enceinte."

She was dumfounded, as though she had received a blow; and it seemed to her that she felt the first stirrings of life within her. Then she was silent, not even listening to what was being said, absorbed in her own thoughts. She could not sleep that night for thinking of the new life that was developing in her, and was sad at the thought that it was Julien's child and might resemble him. The following morning she sent for the baron. "Little father," she said, "my resolution is formed; I wish to know everything, and especially just now; you understand, I insist, and you know that you must not thwart me in my present condition. Listen! You must go and get M. le Curé. I need him here to keep

Rosalie from telling a lie. Then, as soon as he comes, send him up to me, and you stay downstairs with little mother. And, above all things, see that Julien does not suspect anything."

An hour later the priest came, looking fatter than ever, and puffing like the baroness. He sat down in an arm-chair and began to joke, wiping his forehead as usual with his plaid handkerchief. "Well, baroness, I do not think we grow any thinner; I think we make a good pair." Then, turning toward the patient, he said: "Eh, what is this I hear, young lady, that we are soon to have a fresh baptism; Aha, it will not be a boat this time." And in a graver tone he added: "It will be a defender of the country; unless"—after a moment's reflection—"it should be the prospective mother of a family, like you, madame," bowing to the baroness.

The door at the end of the room opened and Rosalie appeared, beside herself, weeping, refusing to enter the room, clinging to the door frame, and being pushed forward by the baron. Quite out of patience, he thrust her into the room. She covered her face with her hands and remained standing there, sobbing.

Jeanne, as soon as she saw her, rose to a sitting posture, whiter than the sheets, and with her heart beating wildly. She could not speak, could hardlly breathe. At length she said, in a voice broken with emotion: "I—I—will not—need—to question you. It—it is enough for me to see you thus—to—to see your—your shame in my presence."

After a pause, for she was out of breath, she continued: "I had M. le Curé come, so that it might be like a confession, you understand."

Rosalie, motionless, uttered little cries that were almost screams behind her hands.

The baron, whose anger was gaining ground, seized her arms, and snatching her hands from her face, he threw her on her knees beside the bed, saying: "Speak! Answer!"

She remained on the ground, in the position assigned to Magdalens, her cap awry, her apron on the floor, and her face again covered by her hands.

Then the priest said: "Come, my girl, listen to what is said to you, and reply. We do not want to harm you, but we want to know what occurred."

Jeanne, leaning over, looked at her and said: "Is it true that you were with Julien when I surprised you?"

Rosalie moaned through her fingers: "Yes, madame."

Then the baroness suddenly began to cry in a choking fashion, and her convulsive sobs accompanied those of Rosalie.

Jeanne, with her eyes fixed on the maid, said: "How long had this been going on?"

"Ever since he came here," faltered Rosalie.

Jeanne could not understand. "Ever since he came—then—ever since—ever since the spring?"

"Yes, madame."

"Ever since he came into this house?"

"Yes, madame."

And Jeanne, as if overflowing with questions, asked, speaking precipitately:

"But how did it happen? How did he approach you? How did he persuade you? What did he say? When, how did you ever yield to him? How could you ever have done it?"

Rosalie, removing her hands from her face, and overwhelmed also with a feverish desire to speak, said:

"How do I know, myself? It was the day he dined here for the first time, and he came up to my room. He had hidden himself in the loft. I did not dare to scream for fear of making a scandal. I no longer knew what I was doing. Then I said nothing because I liked him."

Then Jeanne exclaimed with almost a scream:

"But — your — your child — is his child?"

Rosalie sobbed.

"Yes, madame."

Then they were both silent. The only sound to be heard was the sobs of Rosalie and of the baroness.

Jeanne, quite overcome, felt her tears also beginning to flow; and they fell silently down her cheeks.

The maid's child had the same father as her child! Her anger was at an end; she now was filled with a dreary, slow, profound and infinite despair. She presently resumed in a changed, tearful voice, the voice of a woman who has been crying:

"When we returned from—from down there—from our journey—when did he begin again?"

The little maid, who had sunk down on the floor, faltered: "The first evening."

Each word wrung Jeanne's heart. So on the very first night of their return to the "Poplars" he left her for this girl. That was why he wanted to sleep alone!

She now knew all she wanted to know, and exclaimed: "Go away, go away!" And as Rosalie, perfectly crushed, did not stir, Jeanne called to her father: "Take her away, carry her away!" The priest, who had said nothing as yet, thought that the moment had arrived for him to preach a little sermon.

"What you have done is very wrong, my daughter, very wrong, and God will not pardon you so easily. Consider the hell that awaits you if you do not always act right. Now that you have a child you must behave yourself. No doubt madame la baronne will do something for you, and we will find you a husband."

He would have continued speaking, but the baron, having again seized Rosalie by the shoulders, raised her from the floor and dragged her to the door, and threw her like a package into the corridor. As he turned back into the room, looking paler than his daughter, the priest resumed: "What can one do? They are all like that in the district. It is shocking, but cannot be helped, and then one must be a little indulgent toward the weaknesses of our nature. They never get married until they have become enceinte, never, madame." He added, smiling: "One might call it a local custom. So, you see, monsieur, your maid did as all the rest do."

But the baron, who was trembling with nervousness, interrupted him, saying, "She! what do I care about her! It is Julien with whom I am indignant. It is infamous, the way he has behaved, and I shall take my daughter away."

He walked up and down excitedly, becoming more and more exasperated: "It is infamous to have betrayed my child, infamous! He is a wretch, this man, a cad, a wretch! and I will tell him so. I will slap his face. I will give him a horsewhipping!"

The priest, who was slowly taking a pinch of snuff, seated beside the baroness still in tears, and endeavoring to fulfill his office of a peacemaker, said: "Come, monsieur le baron, between ourselves, he has done what every one else does. Do you know many husbands who are faithful?" And he added with a sly good humor: "Come now, I wager that you have had your turn. Your hand on your heart, am I right?" The baron had stopped in astonishment before the priest, who continued: "Why, yes, you did just as others did. Who knows if you did not make love to a little sugar plum like that? I tell you that every one does. Your wife was none the less happy, or less loved; am I not right?"

The baron had not stirred, he was much disturbed. What the priest said was true, and he had sinned as much as any one and had not hesitated when his wife's maids were in question. Was he a wretch on that account? Why should he judge Julien's conduct so severely when his own had not been above blame?

The baroness, still struggling with her sobs, smiled faintly at the recollection of her husband's escapades, for she belonged to the sentimental class for whom love adventures are a part of existence.

Jeanne, exhausted, lay with wide-open eyes, absorbed in painful reflection. Something Rosalie had said had wounded her as though an arrow had pierced her heart: "As for me, I said nothing, because I liked him."

She had liked him also, and that was the only reason why she had given herself, bound herself for life to him, why she had renounced everything else, all her cherished plans, all the unknown future. She had fallen into this marriage, into this hole without any edges by which one could climb out, into this wretchedness, this sadness, this despair, because, like Rosalie, she had liked him!

The door was pushed violently open and Julien appeared, with a furious expression on his face. He had caught sight of Rosalie moaning on the stairs, and suspected that something was up, that the maid had probably told all. The sight of the priest riveted him to the spot.

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked in a trembling but quiet tone.

The baron, so violent a short while ago, did not venture to speak, afraid of the priest's remarks, and of what his son-in-law might say in the same strain. Little mother was weeping more copiously than ever; but Jeanne had raised herself with her hands and looked, breathing quickly, at the one who had caused her such cruel sorrow. She stammered out: "The fact is, we know all, all your rascality since—since the day you first entered this house—we know that the child of this maid is your child, just as—as—mine is—they will be brothers." Overcome with sorrow at this thought, she buried herself in the sheets and wept bitterly.

Julien stood there gaping, not knowing what to say or do. The priest came to the rescue.

"Come, come, do not give way like that, my dear young lady, be sensible." He rose, approached the bed and placed his warm hand on the despairing girl's forehead. This seemed to soothe her strangely. She felt quieted, as if this strong peasant's hand, accustomed to

the gesture of absolution, to kindly consolations, had conveyed by its touch some mysterious solace.

The good man, still standing, continued: "Madame, we must always forgive. A great sorrow has come to you; but God in His mercy has balanced it by a great happiness, since you will become a mother. This child will be your comfort. In his name I implore you, I adjure you to forgive M. Julien's error. It will be a new bond between you, a pledge of his future fidelity. Can you remain apart in your heart from him whose child you bear?"

She did not reply, crushed, mortified, exhausted as she was, without even strength for anger or resentment. Her nerves seemed relaxed, almost severed, she seemed to be scarcely alive.

The baroness, who seemed incapable of resentment, and whose mind was unequal to prolonged effort, murmured: "Come, come, Jeanne."

Then the priest took the hand of the young man and leading him up to the bed, he placed his hand in that of his wife, and gave it a little tap as though to unite them more closely. Then laying aside his professional tone and manner, he said with a satisfied air: "Well, now, that's done. Believe me, that is the best thing to do." The two hands, joined for a moment, separated immediately. Julien, not daring to kiss Jeanne, kissed his mother-in-law on the forehead, turned on his heel, took the arm of the baron, who acquiesced, happy at heart that the thing had been settled thus, and they went out together to smoke a cigar.

The patient, overcome, dozed off, while the priest and little mother talked in a low tone.

The priest explained and propounded his ideas, to which the baroness assented by nodding her head. He said in conclusion: "Well, then, that is understood; you will give this girl the Barville farm, and I will undertake to find her a husband, a good, steady fellow. Oh! with a property worth twenty thousand francs we shall have no lack of suitors. There will be more than enough to choose from."

The baroness was smiling now, quite happy, with the remains of two tears that had dried on her cheeks.

She repeated: "That is settled. Barville is worth at least twenty thousand francs, but it will be settled on the child, the parents having the use of it during their lifetime."

The curé rose, shook little mother's hand, saying: "Do not disturb yourself, Madame la Baronne, do not disturb yourself; I know what an effort it is."

As he went out he met Aunt Lison coming to see her patient. She noticed nothing: they told her nothing; and she knew nothing, as usual.

CHAPTER VIII

MATERNITY

Rosalie had left the house. Jeanne felt no joy at the thought of being a mother, she had had so much sorrow. She awaited the advent of her child without curiosity, still filled with the apprehension of unknown misfortunes.

A big woman, big as a house, had taken Rosalie's place and supported the baroness in her monotonous walks along her avenue. The baron gave his arm to Jeanne, who was now always ailing, while Aunt Lison, uneasy, and busied about the approaching event, held her other hand, bewildered at this mystery which she would never know.

They all walked along like this almost in silence for hours at a time, while Julien was riding about the country on horseback, having suddenly acquired this taste. Nothing ever came to disturb their dreary life. The baron, his wife, and the vicomte paid a visit to the Fourvilles, whom Julien seemed to be already well acquainted with, without one knowing just how. Another ceremonious visit was exchanged with the Brisevilles, who were still hidden in their manor house.

One afternoon, about four o'clock, two persons, a lady and gentleman on horseback, rode up into the courtyard of the château. Julien, greatly excited, ran up to Jeanne's room. "Quick, quick, come downstairs; here are the Fourvilles. They have just come as neighbors, knowing your condition. Tell them that I have gone out, but that I will be back. I will just go and make myself presentable."

Jeanne, much surprised, went downstairs. A pale, pretty young woman with a sad face, dreamy eyes, and lustreless, fair hair, looking as though the sunlight had never kissed it, quietly introduced her husband, a kind of giant, or ogre with a large red mustache. She added: "We have several times had the pleasure of meeting M. de Lamare. We heard from him how you were suffering, and we would not put off coming to see you as neighbors, without any ceremony. You see that we came on horseback. I also had the pleasure the other day of a visit from madame, your mother, and the baron."

She spoke with perfect ease, familiar but refined. Jeanne was charmed, and fell in love with her at once. "This is a friend," she thought.

The Comte de Fourville, on the contrary, seemed like a bear in the drawing-room. As soon as he was seated, he placed his hat on the chair next him, did not know what to do with his hands, placed them on his knees, then on the arms of the chair, and finally crossed his fingers as if in prayer.

Suddenly Julien entered the room. Jeanne was amazed and did not recognize him. He was shaved. He looked handsome, elegant, and attractive as on the day of their betrothal. He shook the comte's hairy paw, kissed the hand of the comtesse, whose ivory cheeks colored up slightly while her eyelids quivered.

He began to speak; he was charming as in former days. His large eyes, the

mirrors of love, had become tender again. And his hair, lately so dull and unkempt, had regained its soft, glossy wave, with the use of a hairbrush and perfumed oil.

At the moment that the Fourvilles were taking their leave the comtesse, turning toward him, said: "Would you like to take a ride on Thursday, dear vicomte?"

As he bowed and murmured, "Why, certainly, madame," she took Jeanne's hand and said in a sympathetic and affectionate tone, with a cordial smile: "Oh! when you are well, we will all three gallop about the country. It will be delightful. What do you say?"

With an easy gesture she held up her riding skirt and then jumped into the saddle with the lightness of a bird, while her husband, after bowing awkwardly, mounted his big Norman steed. As they disappeared outside the gate, Julien, who seemed charmed, exclaimed: "What delightful people! those are friends who may be useful to us."

Jeanne, pleased also without knowing why, replied: "The little comtesse is charming, I feel that I shall love her, but the husband looks like a brute. Where did you meet them?"

He rubbed his hands together good humoredly. "I met them by chance at the Briseville's'. The husband seems a little rough. He cares for nothing but hunting, but he is a real noble for all that."

The dinner was almost cheerful, as though some secret happiness had come into the house.

Nothing new happened until the latter days of July, when Jeanne was taken ill. As she seemed to grow worse, the doctor was sent for and at the first glance recognized the symptoms of a premature confinement.

Her sufferings presently abated a little, but she was filled with a terrible anguish, a despairing sinking, something like a presentiment, the mysterious touch of death. It is in these moments when it comes so near to us that its breath chills our hearts.

The room was full of people. Little mother, buried in an armchair, was choking with grief. The baron, his hands trembling, ran hither and thither, carrying things, consulting the doctor and losing his head, Julien paced up and down, looking concerned, but perfectly calm, and Widow Dentu stood at the foot of the bed with an appropriate expression, the expression of a woman of experience whom nothing astonishes. The cook, Ludivine, and Aunt Lison remained discreetly concealed behind the door of the lobby.

Toward morning Jeanne became worse, and as her involuntary screams escaped from between her closed teeth, she thought incessantly of Rosalie, who had not suffered, who had hardly moaned, who had borne her child without suffering and without difficulty, and in her wretched and troubled mind she continually compared their conditions and cursed God, whom she had formerly thought to be just. She rebelled at the wicked partiality of fate and at the wicked lies of those who preach justice and goodness.

At times her sufferings were so great that her mind was a blank. She had neither strength, life nor knowledge for anything but suffering.

All at once her sufferings ceased. The nurse and the doctor leaned over her and gave her all attention. Presently she

heard a little cry and, in spite of her weakness, she unconsciously held out her arms. She was suddenly filled with joy, with a glimpse of a new-found happiness which had just unfolded. Her child was born, she was soothed, happy, happy as she never yet had been. Her heart and her body revived; she was now a mother. She felt that she was saved, secure from all despair, for she had here something to love.

From now on she had but one thought —her child. She was a fanatical mother, all the more intense because she had been deceived in her love, deceived in her hopes. She would sit whole days beside the window, rocking the little cradle.

The baron and little mother smiled at this excess of tenderness, but Julien, whose habitual routine had been interfered with and his overweening importance diminished by the arrival of this noisy and all-powerful tyrant, unconsciously jealous of this mite of a man who had usurped his place in the house, kept on saying angrily and impatiently: "How wearisome she is with her brat!"

She became so obsessed by this affection that she would pass the entire night beside the cradle, watching the child asleep. As she was becoming exhausted by this morbid life, taking no rest, growing weaker and thinner and beginning to cough, the doctor ordered the child to be taken from her. She got angry, wept, implored, but they were deaf to her entreaties. His nurse took him every evening, and each night his mother would rise, and in her bare feet go to the door, listen at the keyhole to see if he was sleeping quietly, did not wake up and wanted nothing.

Julien found her here one night when he came home late, after dining with the Fourvilles. After that they locked her in her room to oblige her to stay in bed.

The baptism took place at the end of August. The baron was godfather and Aunt Lison godmother. The child was named Pierre-Simon-Paul and called Paul for short.

At the beginning of September Aunt Lison left without any commotion. Her absence was as little felt as her presence.

One evening after dinner the priest appeared. He seemed embarrassed as if he were burdened by some mystery, and after some idle remarks, he asked the baroness and her husband to grant him a short interview in private.

They all three walked slowly down the long avenue, talking with animation, while Julien, who was alone with Jeanne, was astonished, disturbed and annoyed at this secret.

He accompanied the priest when he took his leave, and they went off together toward the church where the Angelus was ringing.

As it was cool, almost cold, the others went into the drawing-room. They were all dozing when Julien came in abruptly, his face red, looking very indignant.

From the door he called out to his parents-in-law, without remembering that Jeanne was there: "Are you crazy, for God's sake! to go and throw away twenty thousand francs on that girl?"

No one replied, they were so astonished. He continued, bellowing with rage: "How can one be so stupid as that? Do you wish to leave us without a sou?"

The baron, who had recovered his composure, attempted to stop him:

"Keep still! Remember that you are speaking before your wife."

But Julien was trembling with excitement: "As if I cared; she knows all about it, anyway. It is robbing her."

Jeanne, bewildered, looked at him without understanding. She faltered: "What in the world is the matter?"

Julien then turned toward her, to try and get her on his side as a partner who has been cheated out of an unexpected fortune. He hurriedly told her about the conspiracy to marry off Rosalie and about the gift of the Barville property, which was worth at least twenty thousand francs. He said: "Your parents are crazy, my dear, crazy enough to be shut up! Twenty thousand francs! twenty thousand francs! Why, they have lost their heads! Twenty thousand francs for a bastard!"

Jeanne listened without emotion and without anger, astonished at her own calmness, indifferent now to everything but her own child.

The baron was raging, but could find nothing to say. He finally burst forth and, stamping his foot, exclaimed: "Think of what you are saying; it is disgusting. Whose fault was it if we had to give this girl-mother a dowry? Whose child is it? You would like to abandon it now!"

Julien, amazed at the baron's violence, looked at him fixedly. He then resumed in a calmer tone. "But fifteen hundred francs would be quite enough. They all have children before they are legally married. It makes no difference whose child it is, in any case. Instead of giving one of your farms, to the value of twenty thousand francs, in addition to making the world aware of what has happened, you should, to say the least, have had some regard for our name and our position."

He spoke in a severe tone like a man who stood on his rights and was convinced of the logic of his argument. The baron, disturbed at this unexpected discussion, stood there gaping at him. Julien then, seeing his advantage, concluded: "Happily, nothing has yet been settled. I know the young fellow who is going to marry her. He is an honest chap and we can make a satisfactory arrangement with him. I will take charge of the matter."

And he went out immediately, fearing no doubt to continue the discussion, and pleased that he had had the last word, a proof, he thought, that they acquiesced in his views.

As soon as he had left the room, however, the baron exclaimed: "Oh, that is going too far, much too far!"

But Jeanne, happening to look up at her father's bewildered face, began to laugh with her clear, ringing laugh of former days, when anything amused her. She said: "Father, father, did you hear the tone in which he said: 'Twenty thousand francs?' "

Little mother, whose mirth was as ready as her tears, as she recalled her son-in-law's angry expression, his indignant exclamations and his refusal to allow the girl whom he had led astray to be given money that did not belong to him, delighted also at Jeanne's mirth, gave way to little bursts of laughter till the tears came to her eyes. The baron caught the contagion, and all three laughed to kill themselves as they used to do in the good old days.

As soon as they quieted down a little Jeanne said: "How strange it is that all this does not affect me. I look upon

him now as a stranger. I cannot believe that I am his wife. You see how I can laugh at his—his—want of delicacy."

And without knowing why they all three embraced each other, smiling and happy.

Two days later, after breakfast, just as Julien had started away from the house on horseback, a strapping young fellow from twenty-one to twenty-five years old, clad in a brand-new blue blouse with wide sleeves buttoning at the wrist, slyly jumped over the gate, as though he had been there awaiting his opportunity all the morning, crept along the Couillards' ditch, came round the château, and cautiously approached the baron and his wife, who were still sitting under the plane-tree.

He took off his cap and advanced, bowing in an awkward manner. As soon as he was close to them he said: "Your servant, Monsieur le Baron, madame and the company." Then, as no one replied, he said: "It is I, I am Desiré Lecocq."

As the name conveyed nothing to them, the baron asked, "What do you want?"

Then, altogether upset at the necessity of explaining himself, the young fellow stuttered out as he gazed alternately at his cap, which he held in his hands, and at the roof of the château: "It was M'sieu le Curé who said something to me about this matter——" And then he stopped, fearing he might say too much and compromise his own interests.

The other, lowering his voice, blurted out: "That matter of your maid—Rosalie——"

Jeanne, who had guessed what was coming, had risen and moved away with her infant in her arms.

"Come nearer," said the baron, pointing to the chair his daughter had just left. The peasant sat down, murmuring: "You are very good." Then he waited as though he had no more to say. After a long silence, he screwed up courage, and looking up at the sky, remarked: "There's fine weather for the time of year. But the earth will be none the better for it, as the seed is already sown." And then he was silent again.

The baron was growing impatient. He plunged right into the subject and said drily: "Then it is you who are going to marry Rosalie?"

The man at once became uneasy, his Norman caution being on the alert. He replied with more animation, but with a tinge of defiance: "That depends; perhaps yes, perhaps no; it depends."

The baron, annoyed at this hedging, exclaimed angrily: "Answer frankly, damn it! Was this what you came here for? Yes or no! Will you marry her? Yes or no!"

The bewildered man looked steadfastly at his feet: "If it is as M'sieu le Curé said, I will take her, but if it is as M'sieu Julien said, I will not take her."

"What did M. Julien tell you?"

"M'sieu Julien told me fifteen hundred francs and M'sieu le Curé told me that I should have twenty thousand. I will do it for twenty thousand, but I will not do it for fifteen hundred."

The baroness, who was buried in her easy chair, began to giggle at the anxious expression of the peasant, who, not understanding this frivolity, glanced at her angrily out of the corner of his eye and waited in silence.

The baron, who was embarrassed at

this bargaining, cut it short by saying: "I told M. le Curé that you should have the Barville farm during your lifetime and that then it would revert to the child. It is worth twenty thousand francs. I do not go back on my word. Is it settled? Yes or no!"

The man smiled with a humble and satisfied expression, and suddenly becoming loquacious, said: "Oh, in that case, I will not say no. That was all that stood in my way. When M'sieu le Curé spoke to me, I was ready at once, by gosh! and I was very pleased to accommodate the baron who was giving me that. I said to myself, 'Is it not true that when people are willing to do each other favors, they can always find a way and can make it worth while?' But M'sieu Julien came to see me, and it was only fifteen hundred francs. I said to myself: 'I must see about that,' and so I came here. That is not to say that I did not trust you, but I wanted to know. Short accounts make long friends. Is not that true, M'sieu le Baron?"

The baron interrupted him by asking, "When do you wish to get married?"

The man became timid again, very much embarrassed, and finally said, hesitatingly: "I will not do it until I get a little paper."

This time the baron got angry: "Doggone it! you will have the marriage contract. That is the best kind of paper."

But the peasant was stubborn: "Meanwhile I might take a little turn; it will not be dark for a while."

The baron rose to make an end of the matter: "Answer yes or no at once. If you do not wish her, say so; I have another suitor."

The fear of a rival terrified the crafty Norman. He suddenly made up his mind and held out his hand, as after buying a cow, saying: "Put it there, M'sieu le Baron; it is a bargain. Whoever draws back is a skunk!"

The baron shook his hand, then called out: "Ludivine!" The cook appeared at the window. "Bring us a bottle of wine." They clinked glasses to seal the matter and the young peasant went off with a light tread.

Nothing was said to Julien about this visit. The contract was drawn up with all secrecy and as soon as the banns were published the wedding took place one Monday morning.

A neighbor carried the child to church, walking behind the bride and groom, as a sure sign of good luck. And no one in all the district was surprised; they simply envied Desiré Lecocq. "He was born with a caul," they said, with a sly smile into which there entered no resentment.

Julien was terribly angry and made such a scene that his parents-in-law cut short their visit to the "Poplars." Jeanne was only moderately sad at their departure, for little Paul had become for her an inexhaustible source of happiness.

CHAPTER IX

DEATH OF LA BARONNE

As Jeanne's health was quite restored, they determined to go and return the Fourvilles' visit and also to call on the Marquis de Coutelier.

Julien had bought at a sale a new one-horse phaëton, so that they could go out twice a month. They set out one fine December morning, and after driving for two hours across the plains of Normandy, they began to descend a little slope into a little valley, the sides of which were wooded, while the valley itself was cultivated. After an abrupt turn in the valley they saw the Château of Vrillette, a wooded slope on one side of it and a large pond on the other, out of which rose one of its walls and which was bounded by a wood of tall pine trees that formed the other side of the valley.

Julien explained all the portions of the building to Jeanne, like one who knows his subject thoroughly, and went into raptures over its beauty, adding: "It is full of game, this country. The comte loves to hunt here. This is a true seignorial residence."

The hall door was opened and the pale comtesse appeared, coming forward to meet the visitors, all smiles, and wearing a long-trained dress, like a chatelaine of olden times. She looked a fitting lady of the lake, born to inhabit this fairy castle.

The comtesse took both Jeanne's hands, as if she had known her all her life, and made her sit down beside her in a low chair, while Julien, all of whose forgotten elegance seemed to have revived within the past five months, chatted and smiled quietly and familiarly.

The comtesse and he talked of their horseback rides. She was laughing at his manner of mounting a horse and called him "Le Chevalier Trébuche," and he smiled also, having nicknamed her "The Amazon Queen." A gun fired beneath the windows caused Jeanne to give a little scream. It was the comte, who had killed a teal.

His wife called to him. A sound of oars was heard, a boat grinding against the stones, and he appeared, enormous, booted, followed by two drenched dogs of a ruddy color like himself, who lay down on the mat outside the door.

He seemed more at his ease in his own home, and was delighted to see his visitors. He put some wood on the fire, sent for madeira and biscuits and then exclaimed suddenly: "Why, you will take dinner with us, of course."

Jeanne, whose child was never out of her thoughts, declined. He insisted, and as she could not be persuaded, Julien made a gesture of annoyance. She feared to arouse his ugly, quarrelsome temper, and although she was very unhappy at the thought that she should not see Paul until the next day, she consented to stay.

The afternoon was delightful. They first visited the springs which bubbled up at the foot of a mossy rock and then took a row on the pond. At one end of the boat Julien and the comtesse, wrapped in shawls, were smiling

happily like those who have nothing left to wish for.

A huge fire was blazing in the spacious reception room, which imparted a sense of warmth and contentment. The comte seized his wife in his arms and lifted her from the floor as though she had been a child and gave her a hearty kiss on each cheek, like a man satisfied with the world.

Jeanne, smiling, looked at this good giant whom one would have thought was an ogre at the very sight of his mustaches, and she thought: "How one may be deceived each day about everybody." Then, almost involuntarily, she glanced at Julien standing in the doorway, looking horribly pale and with his eyes fixed on the comte. She approached him and said in a low tone: "Are you ill? What is the matter with you?" He answered her angrily: "Nothing. Let me alone! I was cold."

When they went into the dining-room the count asked if he might let his dogs come in, and they settled themselves one on either side of their master.

After dinner, as Jeanne and Julien were preparing to leave, M. de Fourville kept them a little longer to look at some fishing by torchlight. When they finally set out, wrapped up in their cloaks and some rugs they had borrowed, Jeanne said almost involuntarily: "What a fine man that giant is!" Julien, who was driving, replied: "Yes, but he does not always restrain himself before company."

A week later they called on the Couteliers, who were supposed to be the chief noble family in the province. Their property of Remenil adjoined the large town of Cany. The new château built in the reign of Louis XIV. was hidden in a magnificent park enclosed by walls. The ruins of the old château could be seen on an eminence. They were ushered into a stately reception room by men servants in livery. In the middle of the room a sort of column held an immense bowl of Sèvres ware and on the pedestal of the column an autograph letter from the king, under glass, requested the Marquis Leopold-Hervé-Joseph-Germer de Varneville de Rollebosc de Coutelier to receive this present from his sovereign.

Jeanne and Julien were looking at this royal gift when the marquis and marquise entered the room.

They were very ceremonious people whose minds, sentiments and words seemed always to be on stilts. They spoke without waiting for an answer, smiling complacently, appearing always to be fulfilling the duty imposed on them by their position, of showing civilities to the inferior nobility of the region.

Jeanne and Julien, somewhat taken aback, endeavored to be agreeable, but although they felt too embarrassed to remain any longer, they did not know exactly how to take their leave. The marquise herself put an end to the visit naturally and simply by bringing the conversation to a close like a queen giving a dismissal.

On the way home Julien said: "If you like, we will make this our first and last call; the Fourvilles are good enough for me." Jeanne was of the same opinion. December passed slowly and the shut-in life began again as in the previous year. But Jeanne did not find it wearisome, as she was always taken up with Paul, whom Julien looked at askance, uneasy and annoyed. Often

when the mother held the child in her arms, kissing it frantically as women do their children, she would hold it up to its father, saying: "Give him a kiss; one would suppose you did not love him." He would hardly touch with his lips the child's smooth forehead, walking all round it, as though he did not wish to touch the restless little fists. Then he would walk away abruptly as though from something distasteful.

The mayor, the doctor and the curé came to dinner occasionally, and sometimes it was the Fourvilles, with whom they were becoming more and more intimate. The comte appeared to worship Paul. He held him on his knees during the whole visit and sometimes during the whole afternoon, playing with him and amusing him and then kissing him tenderly as mothers do. He always lamented that he had no children of his own.

Comtesse Gilberte again mentioned the rides they all four were going to take together. Jeanne, a little weary of the monotonous days and nights, was quite happy in anticipation of these plans, and for a week amused herself making a riding habit.

They always set out two and two, the comtesse and Julien ahead, the count and Jeanne a hundred feet behind them, talking quietly, like good friends, for such they had become through the sympathy of their straightforward minds and simple hearts. The others often spoke in a low tone, sometimes bursting into laughter and looking quickly at each other, as though their eyes were expressing what they dared not utter. And they would suddenly set off at a gallop, impelled by a desire to flee, to get away, far away.

Then Gilberte would seem to be growing irritable. Her sharp voice, borne on the breeze, occasionally reached the ears of the loitering couple. The comte would smile and say to Jeanne: "She does not always get out of bed the right side, that wife of mine."

One evening as they were coming home the comtesse was teasing her mount, spurring it and then checking it abruptly. They heard Julien say several times: "Take care, take care; you will be thrown." "So much the worse," she replied; "it is none of your business," in a hard clear tone that resounded across the fields as though the words hung in the air.

The animal reared, plunged and champed the bit. The comte, uneasy, shouted: "Be careful, Gilberte!" Then, as if in defiance, with one of those impulses of a woman whom nothing can stop, she struck her horse brutally between the ears. The animal reared in anger, pawed the air with his front feet and, landing again on his feet, gave a bound and darted across the plain at full speed.

First it crossed the meadow, then plunging into a ploughed field kicked up the damp rich earth behind it, going so fast that one could hardly distinguish its rider. Julien remained transfixed with astonishment, calling out in despair: "Madame, madame!" but the comte was rather annoyed, and, bending forward on his heavy mount, he urged it forward and started out at such a pace, spurring it on with his voice, his gestures and the spur, that the huge horseman seemed to be carrying the heavy beast between his legs and to be lifting it up as if to fly. They went

at incredible speed, straight ahead, and Jeanne saw the outline of the wife and of the husband fleeing getting smaller and disappearing in the distance, as if they were two birds pursuing each other to the verge of the horizon.

Julien, approaching Jeanne slowly, murmured angrily: "I think she is crazy to-day." And they set out together to follow their friends, who were now hidden by the rising ground.

At the end of about a quarter of an hour they saw them returning and presently joined them. The comte, perspiring, his face red, but smiling, happy and triumphant, was holding his wife's trembling horse in his iron grasp. Gilberte was pale, her face sad and drawn, and she was leaning one hand on her husband's shoulder as if she were going to faint. Jeanne understood now that the comte loved her madly.

After this the comtesse for some months seemed happier than she had ever been. She came to the "Poplars" more frequently, laughed continually and kissed Jeanne impulsively. One might have said that some mysterious charm had come into her life. Her husband was also quite happy and never took his eyes off her. He said to Jeanne one evening: "We are very happy just now. Gilberte has never been so nice as this. She never is out of humor, never gets angry. I feel that she loves me; until now I was not sure of it."

Julien also seemed changed, no longer impatient, as though the friendship between the two families had brought peace and happiness to both. The spring was singularly early and mild. Everything seemed to be coming to life beneath the quickening rays of the sun. Jeanne was vaguely troubled at this awakening of nature. Memories came to her of the early days of her love. Not that her love for Julien was renewed; that was over, over forever. But all her being, caressed by the breeze, filled with the fragrance of spring, was disturbed as though in response to some invisible and tender appeal. She loved to be alone, to give herself up in the sunlight to all kinds of vague and calm enjoyment which did not necessitate thinking.

One morning as she was in a reverie a vision came to her, a swift vision of the sunlit nook amid the dark foliage in the little wood near Étretat. It was there that she had for the first time trembled, when beside the young man who loved her then. It was there that he had uttered for the first time the timid desire of his heart. It was there that she thought that she had all at once reached the radiant future of her hopes. She wished to see this wood again, to make a sort of sentimental and superstitious pilgrimage, as though a return to this spot might somehow change the current of her life. Julien had been gone since daybreak, she knew not whither. She had the little white horse, which she sometimes rode, saddled, and she set out. It was one of those days when nothing seemed stirring, not a blade of grass, not a leaf. All seemed wrapped in a golden mist beneath the blazing sun. Jeanne walked her horse, soothed and happy.

She descended into the valley which leads to the sea, between the great archs in the cliff that are called the "Gates" of Étretat, and slowly reached the wood. The sunlight was streaming through the still scanty foliage. She wandered about the little paths, looking

for the spot.

All at once, as she was going along one of the lower paths, she perceived at the farther end of it two horses tied to a tree and recognized them at once; thy belonged to Gilberte and Julien. The loneliness of the place was beginning to be irksome to her, and she was pleased at this chance meeting, and whipped up her horse.

When she reached the two patient animals, who were probably accustomed to these long halts, she called. There was no reply. A woman's glove and two riding whips lay on the beaten-down grass. So they had no doubt sat down there awhile and then walked away leaving their horses tied.

She waited a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, surprised, not understanding what could be keeping them. She had dismounted. She sat there, leaning against a tree trunk. Suddenly a thought came to her as she glanced again at the glove, the whips and the two horses left tied there, and she sprang to her saddle with an irresistible desire to make her escape.

She started off at a gallop for the "Poplars." She was turning things over in her mind, trying to reason, to put two and two together, to compare facts. How was it that she had not suspected this sooner? How was it that she had not noticed anything? How was it she had not guessed the reason of Julien's frequent absences, the renewal of his former attention to his appearance and the improvement in his temper? She now recalled Gilberte's nervous abruptness, her exaggerated affection and the kind of beaming happiness in which she seemed to exist latterly and that so pleased the comte.

She reined in her horse, as she wanted to think, and the quick pace disturbed her ideas.

As soon as the first emotion was over she became almost calm, without jealousy or hatred, but filled with contempt. She hardly gave Julien a thought; nothing he might do could astonish her. But the double treachery of the comtesse, her friend, disgusted her. Everyone, then, was treacherous, untruthful and false. And tears came to her eyes. One sometimes mourns lost illusions as deeply as one does the death of a friend.

She resolved, however, to act as though she knew nothing, to close the doors of her heart to all ordinary affection and to love no one but Paul and her parents and to endure other people with an undisturbed countenance.

As soon as she got home she ran to her son, carried him up to her room and kissed him passionately for an hour.

Julien came home to dinner, smiling and attentive, and appeared interested as he asked: "Are not father and little mother coming this year?"

She was so grateful to him for this little attention that she almost forgave him for the discovery she had made in the wood, and she was filled all of a sudden with an intense desire to see without delay the two beings in the world whom she loved next to Paul, and passed the whole evening writing to them to hasten their journey.

They promised to be there on the 20th of May and it was now the 7th.

She awaited their arrival with a growing impatience, as though she felt, in addition to her filial affection, the need of opening her heart to honest hearts, to talk with frankness to pure-

minded people, devoid of all infamy, all of whose life, actions and thoughts had been upright at all times.

What she now felt was a sort of moral isolation, amid all this immorality, and, although she had learned suddenly to disseminate, although she received the comtesse with outstretched hand and smiling lips, she felt this consciousness of hollowness, this contempt for humanity increasing and enveloping her, and the petty gossip of the district gave her a still greater disgust, a still lower opinion of her fellow creatures.

The immorality of the peasants shocked her, and this warm spring seemed to stir the sap in human beings as well as in plants. Jeanne did not belong to the race of peasants who are dominated by their lower instincts. Julien one day awakened her aversion anew by telling her a coarse story that had been told to him and that he considered very amusing.

When the travelling carriage stopped at the door and the happy face of the baron appeared at the window Jeanne was stirred with so deep an emotion, such a tumultuous feeling of affection as she had never before experienced. But when she saw her mother she was shocked and almost fainted. The baroness, in six months, had aged ten years. Her heavy cheeks had grown flabby and purple, as though the blood were congested; her eyes were dim and she could no longer move about unless supported under each arm. Her breathing was difficult and wheezing and affected those near her with a painful sensation.

When Jeanne had taken them to their room, she retired to her own in order to have a good cry, as she was so upset. Then she went to look for her father, and throwing herself into his arms, she exclaimed, her eyes still full of tears: "Oh, how mother is changed! What is the matter with her? Tell me, what is the matter?" He was much surprised and replied: "Do you think so? What an idea! Why, no. I have never been away from her. I assure you that I do not think she looks ill. She always looks like that."

That evening Julien said to his wife: "Your mother is in a pretty bad way. I think she will not last long." And as Jeanne burst out sobbing, he became annoyed. "Come, I did not say there was no hope for her. You always exaggerate everything. She is changed, that's all. She is no longer young."

The baroness was not able to walk any distance and only went out for half an hour each day to take one turn in her avenue and then she would sit on the bench. And when she felt unequal to walking to the end of her avenue, she would say: "Let us stop; my hypertrophy is breaking my legs to-day." She hardly ever laughed now as she did the previous year at anything that amused her, but only smiled. As she could see to read excellently, she passed hours reading "Corinne" or Lamartine's "Meditations." Then she would ask for her drawer of "souvenirs," and emptying her cherished letters on her lap, she would place the drawer on a chair beside her and put back, one by one, her "relics," after she had slowly gone over them. And when she was alone, quite alone, she would kiss some of them, as one kisses in secret a lock of hair of a loved one passed away.

Sometimes Jeanne, coming in abruptly, would find her weeping and

would exclaim: "What is the matter, little mother?" And the baroness, sighing deeply, would reply: "It is my 'relics' that make me cry. They stir remembrances that were so delightful and that are now past forever, and one is reminded of persons whom one had forgotten and recalls once more. You seem to see them, to hear them and it affects you strangely. You will feel this later."

When the baron happened to come in at such times he would say gently: "Jeanne, dearie, take my advice and burn your letters, all of them—your mother's, mine, everyone's. There is nothing more dreadful, when one is growing old, than to look back to one's youth." But Jeanne also kept her letters, was preparing a chest of "relics" in obedience to a sort of hereditary instinct of dreamy sentimentality, although she differed from her mother in every other way.

The baron was obliged to leave them some days later, as he had some business that called him away.

One afternoon Jeanne took Paul in her arms and went out for a walk. She was sitting on a bank, gazing at the infant, whom she seemed to be looking at for the first time. She could hardly imagine him grown up, walking with a steady step, with a beard on his face and talking in a big voice. She heard someone calling and raised her head. Marius came running toward her.

"Madame, Madame la Baronne is very bad!"

A cold chill seemed to run down her back as she started up and walked hurriedly toward the house.

As she approached she saw a number of persons grouped around the plane tree. She darted forward and saw her mother lying on the ground with two pillows under her head. Her face was black, her eyes closed and her breathing, which had been difficult for twenty years, now quite hushed. The nurse took the child out of Jeanne's arms and carried it off.

Jeanne, with drawn, anxious face, asked: "What happened? How did she come to fall? Go for the doctor, somebody." Turning round, she saw the old curé, who had heard of it in some way. He offered his services and began rolling up the sleeves of his cassock. But vinegar, eau de cologne and rubbing the invalid proved ineffectual.

"She should be undressed and put to bed," said the priest.

Joseph Couillard, the farmer, was there and old Simon and Ludivine. With the assistance of Abbé Picot, they tried to lift the baroness, but after an attempt were obliged to bring a large easy chair from the drawing-room and place her in it. In this way they managed to get her into the house and then upstairs, where they laid her on her bed.

Joseph Couillard set out in hot haste for the doctor. As the priest was going to get the holy oil, the nurse, who had "scented a death," as the servants say, and was on the spot, whispered to him: "Do not put yourself out, monsieur; she is dead. I know all about these things."

Jeanne, beside herself, entreated them to do something. The priest thought it best to pronounce the absolution.

They watched for two hours beside this lifeless, discolored body. Jeanne, on her knees. was sobbing in an agony of grief.

When the door opened and the doc-

tor appeared, Jeanne darted toward him, stammering out what she knew of the accident, but seeing the nurse exchange a meaning glance with the doctor, she stopped to ask him: "Is it serious? Do you think it is serious?"

He said presently: "I am afraid—I am afraid—it is all over. Be brave, be brave."

Jeanne, extending her arms, threw herself on her mother's body. Julien just then came in. He stood there amazed, visibly annoyed, without any exclamation of sorrow, any appearance of grief, taken so unawares that he had not time to prepare a suitable expression of countenance. He muttered: "I was expecting it, I felt that the end was near." Then he took out his handkerchief, wiped his eyes, knelt down, crossed himself, and then rising to his feet, attempted to raise his wife. But she was clasping the dead body and kissing it, and it became necessary to carry her away. She appeared to be out of her mind.

At the end of an hour she was allowed to come back. There was no longer any hope. The room was arranged as a death chamber. Julien and the priest were talking in a low tone near the window. It was growing dark. The priest came over to Jeanne and took her hands, trying to console her. He spoke of the defunct, praised her in pious phrases and offered to pass the night in prayer beside the body.

But Jeanne refused, amid convulsive sobs. She wished to be alone, quite alone on this last night of farewell. Julien came forward: "But you must not do it; we will stay together." She shook her head, unable to speak. At last she said: "It is my mother, my mother. I wish to watch beside her alone." The doctor murmured: "Let her do as she pleases; the nurse can stay in the adjoining room."

The priest and Julien consented, more interested in their own rest. Then Abbé Picot knelt down in his turn, and as he rose and left the room, he said: "She was a saint" in the same tone as he said "Dominus vobiscum."

The vicomte in his ordinary tone then asked: "Are you not going to eat something?" Jeanne did not reply, not knowing he was speaking to her, and he repeated: "You had better eat something to keep up your stomach." She replied in a bewildered manner: "Send at once for papa." And he went out of the room to send someone on horseback to Rouen.

She remained plunged in a sort of motionless grief, seeing nothing, feeling nothing, understanding nothing. She only wanted to be alone. Julien came back. He had dined and he asked her again: "Won't you take something?" She shook her head. He sat down with an air of resignation rather than sadness, without speaking, and they both sat there silent, till at length Julien arose, and approaching Jeanne, said: "Would you like to stay alone now?" She took his hand impulsively and replied: "Oh, yes! leave me!"

He kissed her forehead, murmuring: "I will come in and see you from time to time." He went out with Widow Dentu, who rolled her easy chair into the next room.

Jeanne shut the door and opened the windows wide. She felt the soft breath from the mown hay that lay in the moonlight on the lawn. It seemed to harrow her feelings like an ironical remark.

She went back to the bed, took one of the cold, inert hands and looked at her mother earnestly. She seemed to be sleeping more peacefully than she had ever done, and the pale flame of the tapers which flickered at every breath made her face appear to be alive, as if she had stirred. Jeanne remembered all the little incidents of her childhood, the visits of little mother to the "parloir" of the convent, the manner in which she handed her a little paper bag of cakes, a multitude of little details, little acts, little caresses, words, intonations, familiar gestures, the creases at the corner of her eyes when she laughed, the big sigh she gave when she sat down.

And she stood there looking at her, repeating half mechanically: "She is dead," and all the horror of the word became real to her. It was mamma lying there—little mother—Mamma Adelaid who was dead. She would never move about again, nor speak, nor laugh, nor sit at dinner opposite little father. She would never again say: "Good-morning, Jeannette." She was dead!

And she fell on her knees in a paroxysm of despair, her hands clutching the sheet, her face buried in the covers as she cried in a heartrending tone: "Oh, mamma, my poor mamma!" Then feeling that she was losing her reason as she had done on the night when she fled across the snow, she rose and ran to the window to drink in the fresh air. The soothing calmness of the night entered her soul and she began to weep quietly.

Presently she turned back into the room and sat down again beside her mother. Other remembrances came to her: those of her own life—Rosalie, Gilberte, the bitter disillusions of her heart. Everything, then, was only misery, grief, unhappiness and death. Everyone tried to deceive, everyone lied, everyone made you suffer and weep. Where could one find a little rest and happiness? In another existence no doubt, when the soul is freed from the trials of earth. And she began to ponder on this insoluble mystery.

A tender and curious thought came to her mind. It was to read over in this last watch, as though they were a litany, the old letters that her mother loved. It seemed to her that she was about to perform a delicate and sacred duty which would give pleasure to little mother in the other world.

She rose, opened the writing desk and took from the lower drawer ten little packages of yellow letters, tied and arranged in order, side by side. She placed them all on the bed over her mother's heart from a sort of sentiment and began to read them. They were old letters that savored of a former century. The first began, "My dear little granddaughter," then again "My dear little girl," "My darling," "My dearest daughter," then "My dear child," "My dear Adelaide," "My dear daughter," according to the periods—childhood, youth or young womanhood. They were all full of little insignificant details and tender words, about a thousand little matters, those simple but important events of home life, so petty to outsiders: "Father has the grip; poor Hortense burnt her finger; the cat, 'Croquerat,' is dead; they have cut down the pine tree to the right of the gate; mother lost her prayerbook on the way home from church, she thinks it was stolen."

All these details affected her. They

seemed like revelations, as though she had suddenly entered the past secret heart life of little mother. She looked at her lying there and suddenly began to read aloud, to read to the dead, as though to distract, to console her.

And the dead woman appeared to be pleased.

Jeanne tossed the letters as she read them to the foot of the bed. She untied another package. It was a new handwriting. She read: "I cannot do without your caresses. I love you so that I am almost crazy."

That was all; no signature.

She put back the letter without understanding its meaning. The address was certainly "Madame la Baronne Le Perthuis des Vauds."

Then she opened another: "Come this evening as soon as he goes out; we shall have an hour together. I worship you." In another: "I passed the night longing in vain for you, longing to look into your eyes, to press my lips to yours, and I am insane enough to throw myself from the window at the thought that you are another's . . ."

Jeanne was perfectly bewildered. What did that mean? To whom, for whom, from whom were these words of love?

She went on reading, coming across fresh impassioned declarations, appointments with warnings as to prudence, and always at the end the six words: "Be sure to burn this letter!"

At last she opened an ordinary note, accepting an invitation to dinner, but in the same handwriting and signed: "Paul d'Ennemare," whom the baron called, whenever he spoke of him, "My poor old Paul," and whose wife had been the baroness' dearest friend.

Then a suspicion, which immediately became a certainty, flashed across Jeanne's mind: He had been her mother's lover.

And, almost beside herself, she suddenly threw aside these infamous letters as she would have thrown off some venomous reptile and ran to the window and began to cry piteously. Then, collapsing, she sank down beside the wall, and hiding her face in the curtain so that no one should hear her, she sobbed bitterly as if in hopeless despair.

She would have remained thus probably all night, if she had not heard a noise in the adjoining room that made her start to her feet. It might be her father. And all the letters were lying on the floor! He would have to open only one of them to know all! Her father!

She darted into the other room and seizing the letters in handfuls, she threw them all into the fireplace, those of her grandparents as well as those of the lover; some that she had not looked at and some that had remained tied up in the drawers of the desk. She then took one of the tapers that burned beside the bed and set fire to this pile of letters. When they were reduced to ashes she went back to the open window, as though she no longer dared to sit beside the dead, and began to cry again with her face in her hands: "Oh, my poor mamma! oh, my poor mamma!"

The stars were paling. It was the cool hour that precedes the dawn. The moon was sinking on the horizon and turning the sea to mother of pearl. The recollection of the night she passed at the window when she first came to the "Poplars" came to Jeanne's mind. How far away it seemed, how everything was

changed, how different the future now seemed!

The sky was becoming pink, a joyous, love-inspiring, enchanting pink. She looked at it in surprise, as at some phenomenon, this radiant break of day, and asked herself if it were possible that, on a planet where such dawns were found, there should be neither joy nor happiness.

A noise at the door made her start. It was Julien. "Well," he said, "are you not very tired?"

She murmured, "No," happy at being no longer alone. "Go and rest now," he said. She kissed her mother a long, sad kiss; then she went to her room.

The next day passed in the usual attentions to the dead. The baron arrived toward evening. He wept for some time.

The funeral took place the following day. After a pressing a last kiss on her mother's icy forehead and seeing the coffin nailed down, Jeanne left the room. The invited guests would soon arrive.

Gilberte was the first to come, and she threw herself sobbing on her friend's shoulder. Women in black presently entered the room one after another, people whom Jeanne did not know. The Marquise de Coutelier and the Vicomtesse de Briseville embraced her. She suddenly saw Aunt Lison gliding in behind her. She turned round and kissed her tenderly.

Julien came in, dressed all in black, elegant, very important, pleased at seeing so many people. He asked his wife some question in a low tone and added confidentially: "All the nobility are here; it will be a fine affair." And he walked away, gravely bowing to the ladies. Aunt Lison and Comtesse Gilberte alone remained with Jeanne during the service for the dead. The comtesse kissed her repeatedly, exclaiming: "My poor dear, my poor dear!"

When Comte de Fourville came to fetch his wife he was also crying as though it were for his own mother.

CHAPTER X

RETRIBUTION

The following days were very sad and dreary, as they always are when there has been a death in the house. And, in addition, Jeanne was crushed at the thought of what she had discovered; her last shred of confidence had been destroyed with the destruction of her faith. Little father, after a short stay, went away to try and distract his thoughts from his grief, and the large house, whose former masters were leaving it from time to time, resumed its usual calm and monotonous course.

Then Paul fell ill, and Jeanne was almost beside herself, not sleeping for ten days, and scarcely tasting food. He recovered, but she was haunted by the idea that he might die. Then what should she do? What would become of her? And there gradually stole into her heart the hope that she might have another child. She dreamed of it, became ob-

sessed with the idea. She longed to realize her old dream of seeing two little children around her; a boy and a girl.

But since the affair of Rosalie she and Julien had lived apart. A reconciliation seemed impossible in their present situation. Julien loved some one else, she knew it; and the very thought of suffering his approach filled her with repugnance. She had no one left whom she could consult. She resolved to go and see Abbé Picot and tell him, under the seal of confession, all that weighed upon her mind in this matter.

He was reading from his breviary in his little garden planted with fruit trees when she arrived.

After a few minutes' conversation on indifferent matters, she faltered, her color rising: "I want to confess, Monsieur l'Abbé."

He looked at her in astonishment, as he pushed his spectacles back on his forehead; then he began to laugh. "You surely have no great sins on your conscience." This embarrassed her greatly, and she replied: "No, but I want to ask your advice on a subject that is so —so—so painful that I dare not mention it casually."

He at once laid aside his jovial manner and assumed his priestly attitude. "Well, my child, I will listen to you in the confessional; come along."

But she held back, undecided, restrained by a kind of scruple at speaking of these matters, of which she was half ashamed, in the seclusion of an empty church.

"Or else, no—Monsieur le Curé—I might—I might—if you wish, tell you what brings me here. Let us go and sit over there, in your little arbor."

They walked toward it, and Jeanne tried to think how she could begin. They sat down in the arbor, and then, as if she were confessing herself, she said: "Father——" then hesitated, and repeated: "Father——" and was silent from emotion.

He waited, his hands crossed over his paunch. Seeing her embarrassment, he sought to encourage her: "Why, my daughter, one would suppose you were afraid; come, take courage."

She plucked up courage, like a coward who plunges headlong into danger. "Father, I should like to have another child." He did not reply, as he did not understand her. Then she explained, timid and unable to express herself clearly:

"I am all alone in life now; my father and my husband do not get along together; my mother is dead; and—and——" she added with a shudder, "the other day I nearly lost my son! What would have become of me then?"

She was silent. The priest, bewildered, was gazing at her. "Come, get to the point of your subject."

"I want to have another child," she said. Then he smiled, accustomed to the coarse jokes of the peasants, who were not embarrassed in his presence, and he replied, with a sly motion of his head:

"Well, it seems to me that it depends only on yourself."

She raised her candid eyes to his face, and said, hesitating with confusion: "But—but—you understand that since—since—what you know about—about that maid—my husband and I have lived—have lived quite apart."

Accustomed to the promiscuity and

undignified relations of the peasants, he was astonished at the revelation. All at once he thought he guessed at the young woman's real desire, and looking at her out of the corner of his eye, with a heart full of benevolence and of sympathy for her distress, he said: "Oh, I understand perfectly. I know that your widowhood must be irksome to you. You are young and in good health. It is natural, quite natural."

He smiled, bearing out his easy-going character of a country priest, and tapping Jeanne lightly on the hand, he said: "That is permissible, very permissible indeed, according to the commandments. You are married, are you not? Well, then, what is the harm?"

She, in her turn, had not understood his hidden meaning; but as soon as she saw through it, she blushed scarlet, shocked, and with tears in her eyes exclaimed: "Oh, Monsieur le Curé, what are you saying? What are you thinking of? I swear to you—I swear to you——" And sobs choked her words.

He was surprised and sought to console her: "Come, I did not mean to hurt your feelings. I was only joking a little; there is no harm in that when one is decent. But you may rely on me, you may rely on me. I will see M. Julien."

She did not know what to say. She now wished to decline this intervention, which she thought clumsy and dangerous, but she did not dare to do so, and she went away hurriedly, faltering: "I am grateful to you, Monsieur le Curé."

A week passed. One day at dinner Julien looked at her with a peculiar expression, a certain smiling curve of the lips that she had noticed when he was teasing her. He was even almost ironically gallant toward her, and as they were walking after dinner in little mother's avenue, he said in a low tone: "We seem to have made up again."

She did not reply, but continued to look on the ground at a sort of track that was almost effaced now that the grass was sprouting anew. They were the footprints of the baroness, which were vanishing as does a memory. And Jeanne was plunged in sadness; she felt herself lost in life, far away from everyone.

"As for me, I ask nothing better. I was afraid of displeasing you," continued Julien.

The sun was going down, the air was mild. A longing to weep came over Jeanne, one of those needs of unbosoming oneself to a kindred spirit, of unbending and telling one's griefs. A sob rose in her throat; she opened her arms and fell on Julien's breast, and wept. He glanced down in surprise at her head, for he could not see her face which was hidden on his shoulder. He supposed that she still loved him, and placed a condescending kiss on the back of her head.

They entered the house and he followed her to her room. And thus they resumed their former relations, he, as a not unpleasant duty, and she, merely tolerating him.

She soon noticed, however, that his manner had changed, and one day with her lips to his, she murmured: "Why are you not the same as you used to be?"

"Because I do not want any more children," he said jokingly.

She started. "Why not?"

He appeared greatly surprised. "Eh,

what's that you say? Are you crazy? No, indeed! One is enough, always crying and bothering everyone. Another baby! No, thank you!"

At the end of a month she told the news to everyone, far and wide, with the exception of Comtesse Gilberte, from reasons of modesty and delicacy.

What the priest had foreseen finally came to pass. She became enceinte. Then, filled with an unspeakable happiness, she locked her door every night when she retired, vowing herself from henceforth to eternal chastity, in gratitude to the vague divinity she adored.

She was now almost quite happy again. Her children would grow up and love her; she would grow old quietly, happy and contented, without troubling herself about her husband.

Toward the end of September, Abbé Picot called on a visit of ceremony to introduce his successor, a young priest, very thin, very short, with an emphatic way of talking, and with dark circles round his sunken eyes.

The old abbé had been appointed Dean of Goderville.

Jeanne was really sorry to lose the old man, who had been associated with all her recollections as a young woman. He had married her, baptized Paul, and buried the baroness. She could not imagine Étouvent without Abbé Picot and his paunch passing along by the farms, and she loved him because he was cheerful and natural.

But he did not seem very cheerful at the thought of his promotion. "It is a wrench, it is a wrench, madame la comtesse. I have been here for eighteen years. Oh, the place does not bring in much, and is not wealthy. The men have no more religion than they need, and the women, look you, the women have no morals. But nevertheless, I loved it."

The new curé appeared impatient, and said abruptly: "When I am here all that will have to be changed." He looked like an angry boy, thin and frail in his somewhat worn, though clean cassock.

Abbé Picot looked at him sideways, as he did when he was in a joking mood, and said: "You see, abbé, in order to prevent those happenings, you will have to chain up your parishioners; and even that would not be of much use." The little priest replied sharply: "We shall see." And the older man smiled as he took a pinch of snuff, and said: "Age will calm you down, abbé, and experience also. You will drive away from the church the remaining faithful ones, and that is all the good it will do. In this district they are religious, but pig-headed; be careful. Faith, when I see a girl come to confess who looks rather stout, I say to myself: 'She is bringing me a new parishioner,' and I try to get her married. You cannot prevent them from making mistakes; but you can go and look for the man, and prevent him from deserting the mother. Get them married, abbé, get them married, and do not trouble yourself about anything else."

"We think differently," said the young priest rudely; "it is useless to insist." And Abbé Picot once more began to regret his village, the sea which he saw from his parsonage, the little valleys where he walked while repeating his breviary, glancing up at the boats as they passed.

As the two priests took their leave,

the old man kissed Jeanne, who was on the verge of tears.

A week later Abbé Tolbiac called again. He spoke of reforms which he intended to accomplish, as a prince might have done on taking possession of a kingdom. Then he requested the vicomtesse not to miss the service on Sunday, and to communicate at all the festivals. "You and I," he said, "we are at the head of the district; we must rule it and always set them an example to follow. We must be of one accord so that we may be powerful and respected. The church and the château in joining forces will make the peasants obey and fear us."

Jeanne's religion was all sentiment; she had all a woman's dream faith, and if she attended at all to her religious duties, it was from a habit acquired at the convent, the baron's advanced ideas having long since overthrown her convictions. Abbé Picot contented himself with what observances she gave him, and never blamed her. But his successor, not seeing her at mass the preceding Sunday, had come to call, uneasy and stern.

She did not wish to break with the parsonage, and promised, making up her mind to be assiduous in attendance the first few weeks, out of politeness.

Little by little, however, she got into the habit of going to church, and came under the influence of this delicate, upright and dictatorial abbé. A mystic, he appealed to her in his enthusiasm and zeal. He set in vibration in her soul the chord of religious poetry that all women possess. His unyielding austerity, his disgust for ordinary human interests, his love of God, his youthful and untutored inexperience, his harsh words, and his inflexible will, gave Jeanne an idea of the stuff martyrs were made of; and she let herself be carried away, all disillusioned as she was, by the fanaticism of this child, the minister of God.

He led her to Christ, the consoler, showing her how the joy of religion will calm all sorrow; and she knelt at the confessional, humbling herself, feeling herself small and weak in presence of this priest, who appeared to be about fifteen.

He was, however, very soon detested in all the countryside. Inflexibly severe toward himself, he was implacably intolerant toward others, and the one thing that especially roused his wrath and indignation was love. The young men and girls looked at each other slyly across the church, and the old peasants who liked to joke about such things disapproved his severity. All the parish was in a ferment. Soon the young men all stopped going to church.

The curé dined at the château every Thursday, and often came during the week to chat with his penitent. She became enthusiastic like himself, talked about spiritual matters, handling all the antique and complicated arsenal of religious controversy.

They walked together along the baroness' avenue, talking of Christ and the apostles, the Virgin Mary and the Fathers of the Church as though they were personally acquainted with them.

Julien treated the new priest with great respect, saying constantly: "That priest suits me, he does not back down." And he went to confession and communion, setting a fine example. He now went to the Fourvilles' nearly every day, gunning with the husband, who was

never happy without him, and riding with the comtesse, in spite of rain and storm. The comte said: "They are crazy about riding, but it does my wife good."

The baron returned to the château about the middle of November. He was changed, aged, faded, filled with a deep sadness. And his love for his daughter seemed to have gained in strength, as if these few months of dreary solitude had aggravated his need of affection, confidence and tenderness. Jeanne did not tell him about her new ideas, and her friendship for the Abbé Tolbiac. The first time he saw the priest he conceived a great aversion to him. And when Jeanne asked him that evening how he liked him, he replied: "That man is an inquisitor! He must be very dangerous."

When he learned from the peasants, whose friend he was, of the harshness and violence of the young priest, of the kind of persecution which he carried on against all human and natural instincts, he developed a hatred toward him. He, himself, was one of the old race of natural philosophers who bowed the knee to a sort of pantheistic Divinity, and shrank from the catholic conception of a God with bourgeois instincts, Jesuitical wrath, and tyrannical revenge. To him reproduction was the great law of nature, and he began from farm to farm an ardent campaign against this intolerant priest, the persecutor of life.

Jeanne, very much worried, prayed to the Lord, entreated her father; but he always replied: "We must fight such men as that, it is our duty and our right. They are not human."

And he repeated, shaking his long white locks: "They are not human; they understand nothing, nothing, nothing. They are moving in a morbid dream; they are anti-physical." And he pronounced the word "anti-physical" as though it were a malediction.

The priest knew who his enemy was, but as he wished to remain ruler of the château and of Jeanne, he temporized, sure of final victory. He was also haunted by a fixed idea. He had discovered by chance the amours of Julien and Gilberte, and he desired to put a stop to them at all costs.

He came to see Jeanne one day and, after a long conversation on spiritual matters, he asked her to give her aid in helping him to fight, to put an end to the evil in her own family, in order to save two souls that were in danger.

She did not understand, and did not wish to know. He replied: "The hour has not arrived. I shall see you some other time." And he left abruptly.

The winter was coming to a close, a rotten winter, as they say in the country, damp and mild. The abbé called again some days later and hinted mysteriously at one of those shameless intrigues between persons whose conduct should be irreproachable. It was the duty, he said, of those who were aware of the facts to use every means to bring it to an end. He took Jeanne's hand and adjured her to open her eyes and understand and lend him her aid.

This time she understood, but she was silent, terrified at the thought of all that might result in the house that was now peaceful, and she pretended not to understand. Then he spoke out clearly.

She faltered: "What do you wish me to do, Monsieur l'Abbé?"

"Anything, rather than permit this infamy. Anything, I say. Leave him. Flee

from this impure house!"

"But I have no money; and then I have no longer any courage; and, besides, how can I go without any proof? I have not the right to do so."

The priest arose trembling: "That is cowardice, madame; I am mistaken in you. You are unworthy of God's mercy!"

She fell on her knees: "Oh, I pray you not to leave me, tell me what to do!"

"Open M. de Fourville's eyes," he said abruptly. "It is his place to break up this intrigue."

This idea filled her with terror. "Why, he would kill them, Monsieur l'Abbé! And I should be guilty of denouncing them! Oh, never that, never!"

He raised his hand as if to curse her in his fury: "Remain in your shame and your crime; for you are more guilty than they are. You are the complaisant wife! There is nothing more for me to do here." And he went off so furious that he trembled all over.

She followed him, distracted and ready to do as he suggested. But he strode along rapidly, shaking his large blue umbrella in his rage. He perceived Julien standing outside the gate superintending the lopping of the trees, so he turned to the left to go across the Couillard farm, and he said: "Leave me alone, madame, I have nothing further to say to you."

Jeanne was entreating him to give her a few days for reflection, and then if he came back to the château she would tell him what she had done, and they could take counsel together.

Right in his road, in the middle of the farmyard, a group of children, those of the house and some neighbor's children, were standing around the kennel of Mirza, the dog, looking curiously at something with silent and concentrated attention. In the midst of them stood the baron, his hands behind his back, also looking on with curiosity. One would have taken him for a schoolmaster. When he saw the priest approaching, he moved away so as not to have to meet him and speak to him.

The priest did not call again; but the following Sunday from the pulpit he hurled imprecations, curses and threats against the château, anathematizing the baron, and making veiled allusions, but timidly, to Julien's latest intrigue. The vicomte was furious, but the dread of a shocking scandal kept him silent. At each service thereafter the priest declared his indignation, predicting the approach of the hour when God would smite all his enemies.

Julien wrote a firm, but respectful letter to the archbishop; the abbé was threatened with suspension. He was silent thereafter.

Gilberte and Julien now frequently met him during their rides reading his breviary, but they turned aside so as not to pass him by. Spring had come and reawakened their love. As the foliage was still sparse and the grass damp, they used to meet in a shepherd's movable hut that had been deserted since autumn. But one day when they were leaving it, they saw the Abbé Tolbiac, almost hidden in the sea rushes on the slope.

"We must leave our horses in the ravine," said Julien, "as they can be seen from a distance and would betray us." One evening as they were coming home together to La Vrillette, where they were to dine with the comte, they

met the curé of Étouvent coming out of the château. He stepped to the side of the road to let them pass, and bowed without their eyes meeting. They were uneasy for a few moments, but soon forgot it.

One afternoon, Jeanne was reading beside the fire while a storm of wind was raging outside, when she suddenly perceived Comte Fourville coming on foot at such a pace that she thought some misfortune had happened.

She ran downstairs to meet him, and when she saw him she thought he must be crazy. He wore a large quilted cap that he wore only at home, his hunting jacket, and looked so pale that his red mustache, usually the color of his skin, now seemed like a flame. His eyes were haggard, rolling as though his mind were vacant.

He stammered: "My wife is here, is she not?" Jeanne, losing her presence of mind, replied: "Why, no, I have not seen her to-day."

He sat down as if his legs had given way. He then took off his cap and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief mechanically several times. Then starting up suddenly, he approached Jeanne, his hands stretched out, his mouth open, as if to speak, to confide some great sorrow to her. Then he stopped, looked at her fixedly, and said as though he were wandering: "But it is your husband—you also——" And he fled, going toward the sea.

Jeanne ran after him, calling him, imploring him to stop, her heart beating with apprehension as she thought: "He knows all! What will he do? Oh, if he only does not find them!"

But she could not come up to him, and he disregarded her appeals. He went straight ahead without hesitation, straight to his goal. He crossed the ditch, then, stalking through the sea rushes like a giant, he reached the cliff.

Jeanne, standing on the mound covered with trees, followed him with her eyes until he was out of sight. Then she went into the house, distracted with grief.

He had turned to the right and started to run. Threatening waves overspread the sea, big black clouds were scudding along madly, passing on and followed by others, each of them coming down in a furious downpour. The wind whistled, moaned, laid the grass and the young crops low and carried away big white birds that looked like specks of foam and bore them far into the land.

The hail which followed beat in the comte's face, filling his ears with noise and his heart with tumult.

Down yonder before him was the deep gorge of the Val de Vaucotte. There was nothing before him but a shepherd's hut beside a deserted sheep pasture. Two horses were tied to the shafts of the hut on wheels. What might not happen to one in such a tempest as this?

As soon as he saw them the comte crouched on the ground and crawled along on his hands and knees as far as the lonely hut and hid himself beneath the hut that he might not be seen through the cracks. The horses on seeing him became restive. He slowly cut their reins with the knife which he held open in his hand, and a sudden squall coming up, the animals fled, frightened at the hail which rattled on the sloping roof of the wooden hut and made it shake on its wheels.

The comte then kneeling upright, put his eye to the bottom of the door and looked inside. He did not stir; he seemed to be waiting.

A little time elapsed and then he suddenly rose to his feet, covered with mud from head to foot. He frantically pushed back the bolt which closed the hut on the outside, and seizing the shafts, he began to shake the hut as though he would break it to pieces. Then all at once he got between the shafts, bending his huge frame, and with a desperate effort dragged it along like an ox, panting as he went. He dragged it, with whoever was in it, toward the steep incline.

Those inside screamed and banged with their fists on the door, not understanding what was going on.

When he reached the top of the cliff he let go the fragile dwelling, which began to roll down the incline, going ever faster and faster, plunging, stumbling like an animal and striking the ground with its shafts.

An old beggar hidden in a ditch saw it flying over his head and heard frightful screams coming from the wooden box.

All at once a wheel was wrenched off and it fell on its side and began to roll like a ball, as a house torn from its foundations might roll from the summit of a mountain. Then, reaching the ledge of the last ravine, it described a circle, and, falling to the bottom, burst open as an egg might do. It was no sooner smashed on the stones than the old beggar, who had seen it going past, went down toward it slowly amid the rushes, and with the customary caution of a peasant, not daring to go directly to the shattered hut, went to the nearest farm to tell of the accident.

They all ran to look at it and raised the wreck of the hut. They found two bodies, bruised, crushed and bleeding. The man's forehead was split open and his whole face crushed; the woman's jaw was hanging, dislocated in one of the jolts, and their shattered limbs were soft as pulp.

"What were they doing in that shanty?" said a woman.

The old beggar then said that they had apparently taken refuge in it to get out of the storm and that a furious squall must have blown the hut over the cliff. He said he had intended to take shelter there himself, when he saw the horses tied to it, and understood that some one else must be inside. "But for that," he added in a satisfied tone, "I might have rolled down in it." Some one remarked: "Would not that have been a good thing?"

The old man, in a furious rage, said: "Why would it have been a good thing? Because I am poor and they are rich! Look at them now." And trembling, ragged and dripping with rain, he pointed to the two dead bodies with his hooked stick and exclaimed: "We are all alike when we get to this."

The comte, as soon as he saw the hut rolling down the steep slope, ran off at full speed through the blinding storm. He ran in this way for several hours, taking short cuts, leaping across ditches, breaking through the hedges, and thus got back home at dusk, not knowing how himself.

The frightened servants were awaiting his return and told him that the two horses had returned riderless some little time before, that of Julien following the other one.

Then M. de Fourville reeled and in a choked voice said: "Something must have happened to them in this dreadful weather. Let every one help to look for them."

He started off himself, but he was no sooner out of sight than he concealed himself in a clump of bushes, watching the road along which she whom he even still loved with an almost savage passion was to return dead, dying or maybe crippled and disfigured forever.

And soon a carriole passed by carrying a strange burden.

It stopped at the château and passed through the gate. It was that, it was she. But a fearful anguish nailed him to the spot, a fear to know the worst, a dread of the truth, and he did not stir, hiding as a hare, starting at the least sound.

He waited thus an hour, two hours perhaps. The buggy did not come out. He concluded that his wife was expiring; and the thought of seeing her, of meeting her gaze filled him with so much horror that he suddenly feared to be discovered in his hiding place and of being compelled to return and be present at this agony, and he then fled into the thick of the wood. Then all of a sudden it occurred to him that she perhaps might be needing his care, that no one probably could properly attend to her. Then he returned on his tracks, running breathlessly.

On entering the château he met the gardener and called out to him, "Well?" The man did not dare answer him. Then M. de Fourville almost roared at him: "Is she dead?" and the servant stammered: "Yes, M. le Comte."

He experienced a feeling of immense relief. His blood seemed to cool and his nerves relax somewhat of their extreme tension, and he walked firmly up the steps of his great hallway.

The other wagon had reached "The Poplars." Jeanne saw it from afar. She descried the mattress; she guessed that a human form was lying upon it, and understood all. Her emotion was so vivid that she swooned and fell prostrate.

When she regained consciousness her father was holding her head and bathing her temples with vinegar. He said hesitatingly: "Do you know?" She murmured: "Yes, father." But when she attempted to rise she found herself unable to do so, so intense was her agony.

That very night she gave birth to a stillborn infant, a girl.

Jeanne saw nothing of the funeral of Julien; she knew nothing of it. She merely noticed at the end of a day or two that Aunt Lison was back, and in her feverish dreams which haunted her she persistently sought to recall when the old maiden lady had left "The Poplars," at what period and under what circumstances. She could not make this out, even in her lucid moments, but she was certain of having seen her subsequent to the death of "little mother."

CHAPTER XI

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PAUL

JEANNE did not leave her room for three months and was so wan and pale that no one thought she would recover. But she picked up by degrees. Little father and Aunt Lison never left her; they had both taken up their abode at "The Poplars." The shock of Julien's death had left her with a nervous malady. The slightest sound made her faint and she had long swoons from the most insignificant causes.

She had never asked the details of Julien's death. What did it matter to her? Did she not know enough already? Every one thought it was an accident, but she knew better, and she kept to herself this secret which tortured her: the knowledge of his infidelity and the remembrance of the abrupt and terrible visit of the comte on the day of the catastrophe.

And now she was filled with tender, sweet and melancholy recollections of the brief evidences of love shown her by her husband. She constantly thrilled at unexpected memories of him, and she seemed to see him as he was when they were betrothed and as she had known him in the hours passed beneath the sunlight in Corsica. All his faults diminished, all his harshness vanished, his very infidelities appeared less glaring in the widening separation of the closed tomb. And Jeanne, pervaded by a sort of posthumous gratitude for this man who had held her in his arms, forgave all the suffering he had caused her, to remember only moments of happiness they had passed together. Then, as time went on and month followed month, covering all her grief and reminiscences with forgetfulness, she devoted herself entirely to her son.

He became the idol, the one thought of the three beings who surrounded him, and he ruled as a despot. A kind of jealousy even arose among his slaves. Jeanne watched with anxiety the great kisses he gave his grandfather after a ride on his knee, and Aunt Lison, neglected by him as she had been by every one else and treated often like a servant by this little tyrant who could scarcely speak as yet, would go to her room and weep as she compared the slight affection he showed her with the kisses he gave his mother and the baron.

Two years passed quietly, and at the beginning of the third winter it was decided that they should go to Rouen to live until spring, and the whole family set out. But on their arrival in the old damp house, that had been shut up for some time, Paul had such a severe attack of bronchitis that his three relatives in despair declared that he could not do without the air of "The Poplars." They took him back there and he got well.

Then began a series of quiet, monotonous years. Always around the little one, they went into raptures at everything he did. His mother called him Poulet, and as he could not pronounce the word, he said "Pol," which amused them immensely, and the nickname of "Poulet" stuck to him.

The favorite occupation of his

"three mothers," as the baron called his relatives, was to see how much he had grown, and for this purpose they made little notches in the casing of the drawing-room door, showing his progress from month to month. This ladder was called "Poulet's ladder," and was an important affair.

A new individual began to play a part in the affairs of the household—the dog "Massacre," who became Paul's inseparable companion.

Rare visits were exchanged with the Brisevilles and the Couteliers. The mayor and the doctor alone were regular visitors. Since the episode of the mother dog and the suspicion Jeanne had entertained of the priest on the occasion of the terrible death of the comtesse and Julien, Jeanne had not entered the church, angry with a divinity that could tolerate such ministers.

The church was deserted and the priest came to be looked on as a sorcerer because he had, so they said, driven out an evil spirit from a woman who was possessed, and although fearing him the peasants came to respect him for this occult power as well as for the unimpeachable austerity of his life.

When he met Jeanne he never spoke. This condition of affairs distressed Aunt Lison, and when she was alone, quite alone with Paul, she talked to him about God, telling him the wonderful stories of the early history of the world. But when she told him that he must love Him very much, the child would say: "Where is He, auntie?" "Up there," she would say, pointing to the sky; "up there, Poulet, but do not say so." She was afraid of the baron.

One day, however, Poulet said to her: "God is everywhere, but He is not in church." He had told his grandfather of his aunt's wonderful revelations.

When Paul was twelve years old a great difficulty arose on the subject of his first communion.

Lison came to Jeanne one morning and told her that the little fellow should no longer be kept without religious instruction and from his religious duties. His mother, troubled and undecided, hesitated, saying that there was time enough. But a month later, as she was returning a call at the Brisevilles', the comtesse asked her casually if Paul was going to make his first communion that year. Jeanne, unprepared for this, answered, "Yes," and this simple word decided her, and without saying a word to her father, she asked Aunt Lison to take the boy to the catechism class.

All went well for a month, but one day Paul came home with a hoarseness and the following day he coughed. On inquiry his mother learned that the priest had sent him to wait till the lesson was over at the door of the church, where there was a draught, because he had misbehaved. So she kept him at home and taught him herself. But the Abbé Tobiac, despite Aunt Lison's entreaties, refused to admit him as a communicant on the ground that he was not thoroughly taught.

The same thing occurred the following year, and the baron angrily swore that the child did not need to believe all that tomfoolery, so it was decided that he should be brought up as a Christian, but not as an active Catholic, and when he came of age he could believe as he pleased.

The Brisevilles ceased to call on her and Jeanne was surprised, knowing the

punctiliousness of these neighbors in returning calls, but the Marquise de Coutelier haughtily told her the reason. Considering herself, in virtue of her husband's rank and fortune, a sort of queen of the Norman nobility, the marquise ruled as a queen, said what she thought, was gracious or the reverse as occasion demanded, admonishing, restoring to favor, congratulating whenever she saw fit. So when Jeanne came to see her, this lady, after a few chilling remarks, said drily: "Society is divided into two classes: those who believe in God and those who do not believe in Him. The former, even the humblest, are our friends, our equals; the latter are nothing to us."

Jeanne, perceiving the insinuation, replied: "But may one not believe in God without going to church?"

"No, madame," answered the marquise. "The faithful go to worship God in His church, just as one goes to see people in their homes."

Jeanne, hurt, replied: "God is everywhere, madame. As for me, who believes from the bottom of my heart in His goodness, I no longer feel His presence when certain priests come between Him and me."

The marquise rose. "The priest is the standard bearer of the Church, madame. Whoever does not follow the standard is opposed to Him and opposed to us."

Jeanne had risen in her turn and said, trembling: "You believe, madame, in a partisan God. I believe in the God of upright people." She bowed and took her leave.

The peasants also blamed her among themselves for not having let Poulet make his first communion. They themselves never attended service or took the sacrament unless it might be at Easter, according to the rule ordained by the Church; but for boys it was quite another thing, and they would have all shrunk in horror at the audacity of bringing up a child outside this recognized law, for religion is religion.

She saw how they felt and was indignant at heart at all these discriminations, all these compromises with conscience, this general fear of everything, the real cowardice of all hearts and the mask of respectability assumed in public.

The baron took charge of Paul's studies and made him study Latin, his mother merely saying: "Above all things, do not get overtired."

As soon as the boy was at liberty he went down to work in the garden with his mother and his aunt.

He now loved to dig in the ground, and all three planted young trees in the spring, sowed seed and watched it growing with the deepest interest, pruned branches and cut flowers for bouquets.

Poulet was almost fifteen, but was a mere child in intelligence, ignorant, silly, suppressed between petticoat government and this kind old man who belonged to another century.

One evening the baron spoke of college, and Jeanne at once began to sob. Aunt Lison timidly remained in a dark corner.

"Why does he need to know so much?" asked his mother. "We will make a gentleman farmer of him. He can cultivate his land, as many of the nobility do. He will live and grow old happily in this house, where we have lived before him and where we shall die. What more can one do?"

But the baron shook his head. "What

would you say to him if he should say to you when he is twenty-five: 'I amount to nothing, I know nothing, all through your fault, the fault of your maternal selfishness. I feel that I am incapable of working, of making something of myself, and yet I was not intended for a secluded, simple life, lonely enough to kill one, to which I have been condemned by your short-sighted affection.' "

She was weeping and said entreatingly: "Tell me, Poulet, you will not reproach me for having loved you too well?" And the big boy, in surprise, promised that he never would. "Swear it," she said. "Yes, mamma." "You want to stay here, don't you?" "Yes, mamma."

Then the baron spoke up loud and decidedly: "Jeanne, you have no right to make disposition of this life. What you are doing is cowardly and almost criminal; you are sacrificing your child to your own private happiness."

She hid her face in her hands, sobbing convulsively, and stammered out amid her tears: "I have been so unhappy—so unhappy! Now, just as I am living peacefully with him, they want to take him away from me. What will become of me now—all by myself?" Her father rose and, sitting down beside her, put his arms around her. 'And how about me, Jeanne?"

She put her arms suddenly round his neck, gave him a hearty kiss and with her voice full of tears, she said: "Yes, you are right perhaps, little father. I was foolish, but I have suffered so much. I am quite willing he should go to college."

And without knowing exactly what they were going to do with him, Poulet in his turn began to weep.

Then the three mothers began to kiss him and pet him and encourage him. When they retired to their rooms it was with a weight at their hearts, and they all wept, even the baron, who had restrained himself up to that.

It was decided that when the term began to put the young boy to school at Havre, and during the summer he was petted more than ever; his mother sighed often as she thought of the separation. She prepared his wardrobe as if he were going to undertake a ten years' voyage. One October morning, after a sleepless night, the two women and the baron got into the carriage with him and set out on their journey.

They had previously selected his place in the dormitory and his desk in the school room. Jeanne, aided by Aunt Lison, spent the whole day in arranging his clothes in his little wardrobe. As it did not hold a quarter of what they had brought, she went to look for the superintendent to ask for another. The treasurer was called, but he pointed out that all that amount of clothing would only be in the way and would never be needed, and he refused, on behalf of the directors, to let her have another chest of drawers. Jeanne, much annoyed, decided to hire a room in a small neighboring hotel, begging the proprietor to go himself and take Poulet whatever he required as soon as the boy asked for it.

They then took a walk on the pier to look at the ships coming and going. They went into a restaurant to dine, but they were none of them able to eat, and looked at one another with moistened eyes as the dishes were brought on and taken away

almost untouched.

They now returned slowly toward the school. Boys of all ages were arriving from all quarters, accompanied by their families or by servants. Many of them were crying.

Jeanne held Poulet in a long embrace, while Aunt Lison remained in the background, her face hidden in her handkerchief. The baron, however, who was becoming affected, cut short the adieus by dragging his daughter away. They got into the carriage and went back through the darkness to "The Poplars," the silence being broken by an occasional sob.

Jeanne wept all the following day and on the day after drove to Havre in the phaëton. Poulet seemed to have become reconciled to the separation. For the first time in his life he now had playmates, and in his anxiety to join them he could scarcely sit still on his chair when his mother called. She continued her visits to him every other day and called to take him home on Sundays. Not knowing what to do with herself while school was in session until recreation time, she would remain sitting in the reception room, not having the strength or the courage to go very far from the school. The superintendent sent to ask her to come to his office and begged her not to come so frequently. She paid no attention to his request. He therefore informed her that if she continued to prevent her son from taking his recreation at the usual hours, obliging him to work without a change of occupation, they would be forced to send him back home again, and the baron was also notified to the same effect. She was consequently watched like a prisoner at "The Poplars."

She became restless and worried and would ramble about for whole days in the country, accompanied only by Massacre, dreaming as she walked along. Sometimes she would remain seated for a whole afternoon, looking out at the sea from the top of the cliff; at other times she would go down to Yport through the wood, going over the ground of her former walks, the memory of which haunted her. How long ago—how long ago it was—the time when she had gone over these same paths as a young girl, carried away by her dreams.

Poulet was not very industrious at school; he was kept two years in the fourth form. The third year's work was only tolerable and he had to begin the second over again, so that he was in rhetoric when he was twenty.

He was now a big, fair young man, with downy whiskers and a faint sign of a mustache. He now came home to "The Poplars" every Sunday, riding over in a couple of hours, his mother, Aunt Lison and the baron starting out early to go and meet him.

Although he was a head taller than his mother, she always treated him as though he were a child, and when he returned to school in the evening she would charge him anxiously not to go too fast and to think of his poor mother, who would break her heart if anything happened to him.

One Saturday morning she received a letter from Paul, saying that he would not be home on the following day because some friends had arranged an excursion and had invited him. She was tormented with anxiety all day Sunday, as though she dreaded some misfortune, and on Thursday, as she could

endure it no longer, she set out for Havre.

He seemed to be changed, though she could not have told in what manner. He appeared excited and his voice seemed deeper. And suddenly, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, he said: "I say, mother, as long as you have come to-day, I want to tell you that I will not be at 'The Poplars' next Sunday, for we are going to have another excursion."

She was amazed, smothering, as if he had announced his departure for America. At last, recovering herself, she said: "Oh, Poulet, what is the matter with you? Tell me what is going on."

He began to laugh, and kissing her, replied: "Why, nothing, nothing, mamma. I am going to have a good time with my friends; I am just at that age."

She had nothing to say, but when he was alone in the carriage all manner of ideas came into her mind. She no longer recognized him, her Poulet, her little Poulet of former days. She felt for the first time that he was grown up, that he no longer belonged to her, that he was going to live his life without troubling himself about the old people. It seemed to her that one day had wrought this change in him. Was it possible that this was her son, her poor little boy who had helped her to replant the lettuce, this great big bearded youth who had a will of his own!

For three months Paul came home only occasionally, and always seemed impatient to get away again, trying to steal off an hour earlier each evening. Jeanne was alarmed, but the baron consoled her, saying: "Let him alone; the boy is twenty years old."

One morning, however, an old man, poorly dressed, inquired in German-French for "Matame la Vicomtesse," and after many ceremonious bows, he drew from his pocket a dilapidated pocketbook, saying: "Che un betit bapier bour fous," and unfolding as he handed it to her a piece of greasy paper. She read and reread it, looked at the Jew, read it over again and asked: "What does it mean?"

He obsequiously explained: "I will tell you. Your son needed a little money, and as I knew that you are a good mother, I lent him a trifle to help him out."

Jeanne was trembling. "But why did he not ask me?" The Jew explained at length that it was a question of a debt that must be paid before noon the following day; that Paul not being of age, no one would have lent him anything, and that his "honor would have been compromised" without this little service that he had rendered the young man.

Jeanne tried to call the baron, but had not the strength to rise, she was so overcome by emotion. At length she said to the usurer: "Would you have the kindness to ring the bell?"

He hesitated, fearing some trap, and then stammered out: "If I am intruding, I will call again." She shook her head in the negative. He then rang, and they waited in silence, sitting opposite each other.

When the baron came in he understood the situation at once. The note was for fifteen hundred francs. He paid one thousand, saying close to the man's face: "And on no account come back."

The other thanked him and went his way.

The baron and Jeanne set out at once for Havre. On reaching the college they learned that Paul had not been there for a month. The principal had received four letters signed by Jeanne saying that his pupil was not well and then to tell how he was getting along. Each letter was accompanied by a doctor's certificate. They were, of course, all forged. They were all dumbfounded, and stood there looking at each other.

The principal, very much worried, took them to the commissary of police. Jeanne and her father stayed at a hotel that night. The following day the young man was found in the apartment of a courtesan of the town. His grandfather and mother took him back to "The Poplars" and not a word was exchanged between them during the whole journey.

A week later they discovered that he had contracted fifteen thousand francs' worth of debts within the last three months. His creditors had not come forward at first, knowing that he would soon be of age.

They entered into no discussion about it, hoping to win him back by gentleness. They gave him dainty food, petted him, spoiled him. It was spring and they hired a boat for him at Yport, in spite of Jeanne's fears, so that he might amuse himself on the water.

They would not let him have a horse, for fear he should ride to Havre.

He was there with nothing to do and became irritable and occasionally brutally so. The baron was worried at the discontinuance of his studies. Jeanne, distracted at the idea of a separation, asked herself what they could do with him.

One evening he did not come home. They learned that he had gone out in a boat with two sailors. His mother, beside herself with anxiety, went down to Yport without a hat in the dark. Some men were on the beach, waiting for the boat to come in. There was a light on board an incoming boat, but Paul was not on board. He had made them take him to Havre.

The police sought him in vain; he could not be found. The woman with whom he had been found the first time had also disappeared without leaving any trace; her furniture was sold and her rent paid. In Paul's room at "The Poplars" were found two letters from this person, who seemed to be madly in love with him. She spoke of a voyage to England, having, she said, obtained the necessary funds.

The three dwellers in the château lived silently and drearily, their minds tortured by all kinds of suppositions. Jeanne's hair, which had become gray, now turned perfectly white. She asked in her innocence why fate had thus afflicted her.

She received a letter from the Abbé Tolbiac: "Madame, the hand of God is weighing heavily on you. You refused Him your child; He took him from you in His turn to cast him into the hands of a prostitute. Will you not open your eyes at this lesson from Heaven? God's mercy is infinite. Perhaps He may pardon you if you return and fall on your knees before Him. I am His humble servant. I will open to you the door of His dwelling when you come and knock at it."

She sat a long time with this letter

on her lap. Perhaps it was true what he priest had said. And all her religious doubts began to torment her onscience. And in her cowardly hesitation, which drives to church the doubting, the sorrowful, she went furtively ne evening at twilight to the parsonge, and kneeling at the feet of the hin abbé, begged for absolution.

He promised her a conditional pardon, as God could not pour down all His favors on a roof that sheltered a nan like the baron. "You will soon feel he effects of the divine mercy," he leclared.

Two days later she did, indeed, reeive a letter from her son, and in her liscouragement and grief she looked pon this as the commencement of the onsolation promised her by the abbé. The letter ran:

"My Dear Mamma: Do not be unasy. I am in London, in good health, n very great need of money. We have ot a sou left, and we do not have nything to eat some days. The one vho is with me, and whom I love with ll my heart, has spent all that she had o as not to leave me—five thousand rancs—and you see that I am bound n honor to return her this sum in the rst place. So I wish you would be ind enough to advance me fifteen housand francs of papa's fortune, for shall soon be of age. This will help ne out of very serious difficulties.

"Good-by, my dear mamma. I embrace you with all my heart, and also randfather and Aunt Lison. I hope to ee you soon.

"Your son,

"Vicomte Paul de Lamare."

He had written to her! He had not forgotten her then. She did not care anything about his asking for money! She would send him some as long as he had none. What did money matter? He had written to her! And she ran, weeping for joy, to show this letter to the baron. Aunt Lison was called and read over word by word this paper that told of him. They discussed each sentence.

Jeanne, jumping from the most complete despair to a kind of intoxication of hope, took Paul's part. "He will come back, he will come back as he has written."

The baron, more calm, said: "All the same he left us for that creature, so he must love her better than us, as he did not hesitate about it."

A sudden and frightful pang struck Jeanne's heart, and immediately she was filled with hatred of this woman who had stolen her son from her, an unappeasable, savage hate, the hatred of a jealous mother. Until now all her thoughts had been given to Paul. She scarcely took into consideration that a girl had been the cause of his vagaries. But the baron's words had suddenly brought before her this rival, had revealed her fatal power, and she felt that between herself and this woman a struggle was about to begin, and she also felt that she would rather lose her son than share his affection with another. And all her joy was at an end.

They sent him the fifteen thousand francs and heard nothing more from him for five months.

Then a business man came to settle the details of Julien's inheritance. Jeanne and the baron handed over the accounts without any discussion, even giving up the interest that should come

to his mother. When Paul came back to Paris he had a hundred and twenty thousand francs. He then wrote four letters in six months, giving his news in concise terms and ending the letters with coldly affectionate expressions. "I am working," he said; "I have obtained a position on the stock exchange. I hope to go and embrace you at 'The Poplars' some day, my dear parents."

He did not mention his companion, and this silence implied more than if he had filled four pages with news of her. Jeanne, in these cold letters, felt this woman in ambush, the implacable, eternal enemy of mothers, the courtesan.

The three lonely beings discussed the best plan to follow in order to rescue Paul, but could decide on nothing. A voyage to Paris? What good would it do?

"Let his passion exhaust itself. He will come back then of his own accord," said the baron.

Some time passed without any further news. But one morning they were terrified at the receipt of a despairing letter:

"My Poor Mamma: I am lost. There is nothing left for me to do but to blow out my brains unless you come to my aid. A speculation that gave every prospect of success has fallen through, and I am eighty-five thousand dollars in debt. I shall be dishonored if I do not pay up—ruined—and it will henceforth be impossible for me to do anything. I am lost. I repeat that I would rather blow out my brains than undergo this disgrace. I should have done so already, probably, but for the encouragement of a woman of whom I never speak to you, and who is my providence.

"I embrace you from the bottom of my heart, my dear mamma—perhaps for the last time. Good-by.

"Paul."

A package of business papers accompanying the letter gave the details of the failure.

The baron answered by return mail that they would see what could be done. Then he set out for Havre to get advice and he mortgaged some property to raise the money which was sent to Paul.

The young man wrote three letters full of the most heartfelt thanks and passionate affection, saying he was coming home at once to see his dear parents.

But he did not come.

A whole year passed. Jeanne and the baron were about to set out for Paris to try and make a last effort, when they received a line to say that he was in London again, setting an enterprise on foot in connection with steamboats under the name of "Paul de Lamare & Co." He wrote: "This will give me an assured fortune, and perhaps great wealth, and I am risking nothing. You can see at once what a splendid thing it is. When I see you again I shall have a fine position in society. There is nothing but business these days to help you out of difficulties."

Three months later the steamboat company failed and the manager was being sought for on account of certain irregularities in business methods. Jeanne had a nervous attack that lasted several hours and then she took to her bed.

The baron again went to Havre to

nake inquiries, saw some lawyers, some ousiness men, some solicitors and bailiffs and found that the liabilities of he De Lamare concern were two hundred and thirty-five thousand francs, and he once more mortgaged some property. The château of "The Poplars" and the two farms and all that went with them were mortgaged for a large sum.

One evening as he was arranging the final details in the office of a business man, he fell over on the floor with a stroke of apoplexy.

A man was sent on horseback to notify Jeanne, but when she arrived he was dead.

She took his body back to "The Poplars," so overcome that her grief was numbness rather than despair.

Abbé Tolbiac refused to permit the body to be brought to the church, despite the distracted entreaties of the two women. The baron was interred at twilight without any religious ceremony.

Paul learned of the event through one of the men who was settling up his affairs. He was still in hiding in England. He wrote to make excuses for not having come home, saying that he had learned of his grandfather's death too late. "However, now that you have helped me out of my difficulties, my dear mamma, I shall go back to France and hope to embrace you soon."

Jeanne was so crushed in spirit that she appeared not to understand anything. Toward the end of the winter Aunt Lison, who was now sixty-eight, had an attack of bronchitis that developed into pneumonia, and she died quietly, murmuring with her last breath: "My poor little Jeanne, I will ask God to take pity on you."

Jeanne followed her to the grave, and as the earth fell on her coffin she sank to the ground, wishing that she might die also, so as not to suffer, to think. A strong peasant woman lifted her up and carried her away as if she had been a child.

When she reached the château Jeanne, who had spent the last five nights at Aunt Lison's bedside, allowed herself to be put to bed without resistance by this unknown peasant woman, who handled her with gentleness and firmness, and she fell asleep from exhaustion, overcome with weariness and suffering.

She awoke about the middle of the night. A night light was burning on the mantelpiece. A woman was asleep in her easy chair. Who was this woman? She did not recognize her, and leaning over the edge of her bed, she sought to examine her features by the dim light of the wick floating in oil in a tumbler of water.

It seemed to her that she had seen this face. But when, but where? The woman was sleeping peacefully, her head to one side and her cap on the floor. She might be about forty or forty-five. She was stout, with a high color, squarely built and powerful. Her large hands hung down at either side of the chair. Her hair was turning gray. Jeanne looked at her fixedly, her mind in the disturbed condition of one awakening from a feverish sleep after a great sorrow.

She had certainly seen this face! Was it in former days? Was it of late years? She could not tell, and the idea distressed her, upset her nerves. She rose noiselessly to take another look at the

sleeping woman, walking over on tiptoe. It was the woman who had lifted her up in the cemetery and then put her to bed. She remembered this confusedly.

But had she met her elsewhere at some other time of her life or did she only imagine she recognized her amid the confused recollections of the day before? And how did she come to be there in her room and why?

The woman opened her eyes and, seeing Jeanne, she rose to her feet suddenly. They stood face to face, so close that they touched one another. The stranger said crossly: "What! are you up? You will be ill, getting up at this time of night. Go back to bed!"

"Who are you?" asked Jeanne.

But the woman, opening her arms, picked her up and carried her back to her bed with the strength of a man. And as she laid her down gently and drew the covers over her, she leaned over close to Jeanne and, weeping as she did so, she kissed her passionately on the cheeks, her hair, her eyes, the tears falling on her face as she stammered out: "My poor mistress, Mam'zelle Jeanne, my poor mistress, don't you recognize me?"

"Rosalie, my girl!" cried Jeanne, throwing her arms round her neck and hugging her as she kissed her, and they sobbed together, clasped in each other's arms.

Rosalie was the first to regain her calmness. "Come," she said, "you must be sensible and not catch cold." And she covered her up warm and straightened the pillow under her former mistress' head. The latter continued to sob, trembling all over at the recollections that were awakened in her mind. She finally inquired: "How did you come back, my poor girl?"

"Pardi! do you suppose I was going to leave you all alone like that, now?" replied Rosalie.

"Light a candle, so I may see you," said Jeanne. And when the candle was brought to the bedside they looked at each other for some time without speaking a word. Then Jeanne, holding out her hand to her former maid, murmured: "I should not have recognized you, my girl, you have changed greatly; did you know it? But not as much as I have." And Rosalie, looking at this white-haired woman, thin and faded, whom she had left a beautiful and fresh young woman, said: "That is true, you have changed, Madame Jeanne, and more than you should. But remember, however, that we have not seen each other for twenty-five years."

They were silent, thinking over the past. At length Jeanne said hesitatingly: "Have you been happy?"

Rosalie, fearful of awakening certain painful souvenirs, stammered out: "Why—yes—yes—madame. I have nothing much to complain of. I have been happier than you have—that is sure. There was only one thing that always weighed on my heart, and that was that I did not stay here——" And she stopped suddenly, sorry she had referred to that unintentionally. But Jeanne replied gently: "How could you help it, my girl? One cannot always do as they wish. You are a widow now, also, are you not?" Then her voice trembled with emotion as she said: "Have you other—other children?"

"No, madame."

"And he—your—your boy—what has become of him? Has he turned out well?"

"Yes, madame, he is a good boy and vorks industriously. He has been mar-ied for six months, and he can take my arm now, since I have come back to ou."

Jeanne murmured in a trembling oice: "Then you will never leave me gain, my girl?"

"No, indeed, madame, I have ar-anged all that."

Jeanne, in spite of herself, began to ompare their lives, but without any itterness, for she was now resigned to he unjust cruelty of fate. She said: And your husband, how did he treat ou?"

"Oh, he was a good man, madame, nd not lazy; he knew how to make noney. He died of consumption."

Then Jeanne, sitting up in bed, filled ith a longing to know more, said: Come, tell me everything, my girl, all bout your life. It will do me good just ow."

Rosalie, drawing up her chair, began o tell about herself, her home, her eople, entering into those minute de-ails dear to country people, describing er yard, laughing at some old recollec-on that reminded her of good times he had had, and raising her voice by egrees like a farmer's wife accustomed o command. She ended by saying: "Oh, am well off now. I don't have to orry." Then she became confused gain, and said in a lower tone: "It is o you that I owe it, anyhow; and you now I do not want any wages. No, ndeed! No, indeed! And if you will not ave it so, I will go."

Jeanne replied: "You do not mean that you are going to serve me for noth-ing?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, madame. Money! You give me money! Why, I have al-most as much as you. Do you know what is left to you with all your jumble of mortgages and borrowing, and inter-ests unpaid which are mounting up every year? Do you know? No, is it not so? Well, then, I can promise you that you have not even ten thousand francs income. Not ten thousand, do you understand? But I will settle all that for you, and very quickly."

She had begun talking loud again, carried away in her indignation at these interests left unpaid, at this threatening ruin. And as a faint, tender smile passed over the face of her mistress, she cried in a tone of annoyance: "You must not laugh, madame, for without money we are nothing but laborers."

Jeanne took hold of her hands and kept them in her own; then she said slowly, still full of the idea that haunted her: "Oh, I have had no luck. Every-thing has gone against me. Fate has a grudge against my life."

But Rosalie shook her head: "You must not say that, madame. You mar-ried badly, that's all. One should not marry like that, anyway, without know-ing anything about one's intended."

And they went on talking about themselves just as two old friends might have done.

The sun rose while they were still talking.

CHAPTER XII

A NEW HOME

In a week's time Rosalie had taken absolute control of everything and every one in the château. Jeanne was quite resigned and obeyed passively. Weak and dragging her feet as she walked, as little mother had formerly done, she went out walking leaning on Rosalie's arm, the latter lecturing her and consoling her with abrupt and tender words as they walked slowly along, treating her mistress as though she was a sick child.

They always talked of bygone days, Jeanne with tears in her throat, and Rosalie in the quiet tone of a phlegmatic peasant. The servant kept referring to the subject of unpaid interests; and at last requested Jeanne to give her up all the business papers that Jeanne, in her ignorance of money matters, was hiding from her, out of consideration for her son.

After that, for a week, Rosalie went to Fécamp every day to have matters explained to her by a lawyer whom she knew.

One evening, after having put her mistress to bed, she sat down by the bedside and said abruptly: "Now that you are settled quietly, madame, we will have a chat." And she told her exactly how matters stood.

When everything was settled, there would be about seven thousand francs of income left, no more.

"We cannot help it, my girl," said Jeanne. "I feel that I shall not make old bones, and there will be quite enough for me."

But Rosalie was annoyed: "For you, madame, it might be; but M. Paul—will you leave nothing for him?"

Jeanne shuddered. "I beg you not to mention him again. It hurts me too much to think about him."

"But I wish to speak about him, because you see you are not brave, Madame Jeanne. He does foolish things. Well! what of it? He will not do so always; and then he will marry and have children. He will need money to bring them up. Pay attention to me: you must sell 'The Poplars.' "

Jeanne sprang up in a sitting posture. "Sell 'The Poplars'! Do you mean it? Oh, never, never!"

But Rosalie was not disturbed. "I tell you that you will sell the place, madame, because it must be done." And then she explained her calculations, her plans, her reasons.

Once they had sold "The Poplars" and the two farms belonging to it to a buyer whom she had found, they would keep four farms situated at St. Léonard, which, free of all mortgage, would bring in an income of eight thousand three hundred francs. They would set aside thirteen hundred francs a year for repairs and for the upkeep of the property; there would then remain seven thousand francs, five thousand of which would cover the annual expenditures and the other two thousand would be put away for a rainy day.

She added: "All the rest has been squandered; there is an end of it. And then I am to keep the key, you under-

stand. As for M. Paul, he will have nothing left, nothing; he would take your last sou from you."

Jeanne, who was weeping silently, murmured:

"But if he has nothing to eat?"

"He can come and eat with us if he is hungry. There will always be a bed and some stew for him. Do you believe he would have acted as he has done if you had not given him a sou in the first place?"

"But he was in debt, he would have been disgraced."

"When you have nothing left, will that prevent him from making fresh debts? You have paid his debts, that is all right; but you will not pay any more; it is I who am telling you this. Now good-night, madame."

And she left the room.

Jeanne did not sleep, she was so upset at the idea of selling "The Poplars," of going away, of leaving this house to which all her life was linked.

When Rosalie came into the room next morning she said to her: "My poor girl, I never could make up my mind to go away from here."

But the servant grew angry: "It will have to be, however, madame; the lawyer will soon be here with the man who wants to buy the château. Otherwise, in four years you will not have a rap left."

Jeanne was crushed, and repeated: "I could not do it; I never could."

An hour later the postman brought her a letter from Paul asking for ten thousand francs. What should she do? At her wit's end, she consulted Rosalie, who threw up her hands, exclaiming: "What was I telling you, madame? Ah! You would have been in a nice fix, both of you, if I had not come back." And Jeanne, bending to her servant's will, wrote as follows to the young man:

"My Dear Son: I can do nothing more for you. You have ruined me; I am even obliged to sell 'The Poplars.' But never forget that I shall always have a home whenever you want to seek shelter with your old mother, to whom you have caused much suffering.

"Jeanne."

When the notary arrived with M. Jeoffrin, a retired sugar refiner, she received them herself, and invited them to look over the château.

A month later, she signed a deed of sale, and also bought herself a little cottage in the neighborhood of Goderville, on the high road to Montiviliers, in the hamlet of Batteville.

Then she walked up and down all alone until evening, in little mother's avenue, with a sore heart and troubled mind, bidding distracted and sobbing farewells to the landscape, the trees, the rustic bench under the plane tree, to all those things she knew so well and that seemed to have become part of her vision and her soul, the grove, the mound overlooking the plain, where she had so often sat, and from where she had seen the Comte de Fourville running toward the sea on that terrible day of Julien's death, to an old elm whose upper branches were missing, against which she had often leaned, and to all this familiar garden spot.

Rosalie came out and took her by the arm to make her come into the house.

A tall young peasant of twenty-five was waiting outside the door. He greeted her in a friendly manner as if he had

known her for some time: "Good-morning, Madame Jeanne. I hope you are well. Mother told me to come and help you move. I would like to know what you are going to take away, seeing that I shall do it from time to time so as not to interfere with my farm work."

It was her maid's son, Julien's son, Paul's brother.

She felt as if her heart stopped beating; and yet she would have liked to embrace this young fellow.

She looked at him, trying to find some resemblance to her husband or to her son. He was ruddy, vigorous, with fair hair and his mother's blue eyes. And yet he looked like Julien. In what way? How? She could not have told, but there was something like him in the whole makeup of his face.

The young man resumed: "If you could show me at once, I should be much obliged."

But she had not yet decided what she was going to take with her, as her new home was very small; and she begged him to come back again at the end of the week.

She was now entirely occupied with getting ready to move, which brought a little variety into her very dreary and hopeless life. She went from room to room, picking out the furniture which recalled episodes in her life, old friends, as it were, who have a share in our life and almost of our being, whom we have known since childhood, and to which are linked our happy or sad recollections, dates in our history; silent companions of our sad or sombre hours, who have grown old and become worn at our side, their covers torn in places, their joints shaky, their color faded.

She selected them, one by one, sometimes hesitating and troubled, as if she were taking some important step, changing her mind every instant, weighing the merits of two easy chairs or of some old writing-desk and an old work table.

She opened the doors, sought to recall things; then, when she had said to herself, "Yes, I will take this," the article was taken down into the dining-room.

She wished to keep all the furniture of her room, her bed, her tapestries, her clock, everything.

She took away some of the parlor chairs, those that she had loved as a little child; the fox and the stork, the fox and the crow, the ant and the grasshopper, and the melancholy heron.

Then, while wandering about in all the corners of this dwelling she was going to forsake, she went one day up into the loft, where she was filled with amazement; it was a chaos of articles of every kind, some broken, others tarnished only, others taken up there for no special reason probably, except that they were tired of them or that they had been replaced by others. She saw numberless knick-knacks that she remembered, and that had disappeared suddenly, trifles that she had handled, those old little insignificant articles that she had seen every day without noticing, but which now, discovered in this loft, assumed an importance as of forgotten relics, of friends that she had found again.

She went from one to the other of them with a little pang, saying: "Why, it was I who broke that china cup a few evenings before my wedding. Ah! there is mother's little lantern and a cane that little father broke in trying to open the gate when the wood was swollen

with the rain."

There were also a number of things that she did not remember that had belonged to her grandparents or to their parents, dusty things that appeared to be exiled in a period that is not their own, and that looked sad at their abandonment, and whose history, whose experiences no one knows, for they never saw those who chose them, bought them, owned them, and loved them; never knew the hands that had touched them familiarly, and the eyes that looked at them with delight.

Jeanne examined carefully three-legged chairs to see if they recalled any memories, a copper warming pan, a damaged foot stove that she thought she remembered, and a number of housekeeping utensils unfit for use.

She then put together all the things she wished to take, and going downstairs, sent Rosalie up to get them. The servant indignantly refused to bring down "that rubbish." But Jeanne, who had not much will left, held her own this time, and had to be obeyed.

One morning the young farmer, Julien's son, Denis Lecoq, came with his wagon for the first load. Rosalie went back with him in order to superintend the unloading and placing of furniture where it was to stand.

Rosalie had come back and was waiting for Jeanne, who had been out on the cliff. She was enchanted with the new house, declaring it was much more cheerful than this old box of a building, which was not even on the side of the road.

Jeanne wept all the evening.

Ever since they heard that the château was sold, the farmers were not more civil to her than necessary, calling her among themselves "the crazy woman," without knowing exactly why, but doubtless because they guessed with their animal instinct at her morbid and increasing sentimentality, at all the disturbance of her poor mind that had undergone so much sorrow.

The night before they left she chanced to go into the stable. A growl made her start. It was Massacre, whom she had hardly thought of for months. Blind and paralyzed, having reached a great age for an animal, he existed in a straw bed, taken care of by Ludivine, who never forgot him. She took him in her arms, kissed him, and carried him into the house. As big as a barrel, he could scarcely carry himself along on his stiff legs, and he barked like the wooden dogs that one gives to children.

The day of departure finally came. Jeanne had slept in Julien's old room, as hers was dismantled. She got up exhausted and short of breath as if she had been running. The carriage containing the trunks and the rest of the furniture was in the yard ready to start. Another two-wheeled vehicle was to take Jeanne and the servant. Old Simon and Ludivine were to stay until the arrival of a new proprietor, and then to go to some of their relations, Jeanne having provided a little income for them. They had also saved up some money, and being now very old and garrulous, they were not of much use in the house. Marius had long since married and left.

About eight o'clock it began to rain, a fine icy rain, driven by a light breeze. On the kitchen table some cups of café au lait were steaming. Jeanne sat down and sipped hers, then rising, she said, "Come along."

She put on her hat and shawl, and while Rosalie was putting on her overshoes, she said in a choking voice: "Do you remember, my girl, how it rained when we left Rouen to come here?"

As she said this, she put her two hands to her breast and fell over on her back, unconscious. She remained thus over an hour, apparently dead. Then she opened her eyes and was seized with convulsions accompanied by floods of tears.

When she was a little calmer she was so weak that she could not stand up, and Rosalie, fearing another attack if they delayed their departure, went to look for her son. They took her up and carried her to the carriage, placed her on the wooden bench covered with leather; and the old servant got in beside her, wrapped her up with a big cloak, and holding an umbrella over her head, cried: "Quick, Denis, let us be off." The young man climbed up beside his mother and whipped up the horse, whose jerky pace made the two women bounce about vigorously.

As they turned the corner to enter the village, they saw some one stalking along the road; it was Abbé Tolbiac, who seemed to be watching for them to go by. He stopped to let the carriage pass. He was holding up his cassock with one hand, to keep it out of the mud, and his thin legs, encased in black stockings, ended in a pair of enormous muddy shoes.

Jeanne lowered her eyes so as not to meet his glance, and Rosalie, who had heard all about him, flew into a rage. "Peasant! Peasant!" she murmured; and then seizing her son's hand: "Give him a good slash with the whip."

But the young man, just as they were passing the priest, made the wheel of the wagon, which was going at full speed, sink into a rut, splashing the abbé with mud from head to foot.

Rosalie was delighted and turned round to shake her fist at him, while the priest was wiping off the mud with his big handkerchief.

All at once Jeanne exclaimed: "We have forgotten Massacre!" They stopped, and, getting down, Denis ran to fetch the dog, while Rosalie held the reins. He presently reappeared, carrying in his arms the shapeless and crippled animal, which he placed at the feet of the two women.

CHAPTER XIII

JEANNE IN PARIS

Two hours later the carriage stopped at a little brick house built in the middle of a lot planted with pear trees at the side of the high road.

Four trellised arbors covered with honeysuckle and clematis formed the four corners of the garden, which was divided into little beds of vegetables separated by narrow paths bordered with fruit trees.

A very high box hedge enclosed the whole property, which was separated by

a field from the neighboring farm. There was a blacksmith's shop about a hundred feet further along the road. There were no other houses within three-quarters of a mile.

The house commanded a view of the level district of Caux, covered with farms surrounded by their four double rows of tall trees which enclosed the courtyard planted with apple trees.

As soon as they reached the house, Jeanne wanted to rest; but Rosalie would not allow her to do so for fear she would begin to think of the past.

The carpenter from Goderville was there, and they began at once to place the furniture that had already arrived while waiting for the last load. This required a good deal of thought and planning.

At the end of an hour the wagon appeared at the gate and had to be unloaded in the rain. When night fell the house was in utter disorder, with things piled up anyhow. Jeanne, tired out, fell asleep as soon as she got into bed.

She had no time to mourn for some days, as there was so much to be done. She even took a certain pleasure in making her new house look pretty, the thought that her son would come back there haunting her continually. The tapestries from her old room were hung in the dining-room, which also had to serve as a parlor; and she took special pains with one of the two rooms on the first floor, which she thought of as "Poulet's room."

She kept the other room herself, Rosalie sleeping above, next to the loft. The little house, furnished with care, was very pretty, and Jeanne was happy there at first, although she seemed to lack something, but she did not know what.

One morning the lawyer's clerk from Fécamp brought her three thousand six hundred francs, the price of the furniture left at "The Poplars," and valued by an upholsterer. She had a little thrill of pleasure at receiving this money, and as soon as the man had gone, she ran to put on her hat, so as to get to Goderville as quickly as possible to send Paul this unexpected sum.

But as she was hurrying along the high road she met Rosalie coming from market. The servant suspected something, without at once guessing the facts; and when she discovered them, for Jeanne could hide nothing from her, she placed her basket on the ground that she might get angry with more comfort.

She began to scold with her fists on her hips; then taking hold of her mistress with her right arm and taking her basket in her left, and still fuming, she continued on her way to the house.

As soon as they were in the house the servant asked to have the money handed over to her. Jeanne gave all but six hundred francs, which she held back; but Rosalie soon saw through her tricks, and she was obliged to hand it all over. However, she consented to her sending this amount to the young man.

A few days later he wrote: "You have rendered me a great service, my dear mother, for we were in the greatest distress."

Jeanne, however, could not get accustomed to Batteville. It seemed to her as if she could not breathe as she did formerly, that she was more lonely, more deserted, more lost than ever. She went out for a walk, got as far as the hamlet of Verneuil, came back by the Trois-Mares, came home, then suddenly

wanted to start out again, as if she had forgotten to go to the very place she intended.

And every day she did the same thing without knowing why. But one evening a thought came to her unconsciously which revealed to her the secret of her restlessness. She said as she was sitting down to dinner: "Oh, how I long to see the sea!"

That was what she had missed so greatly, the sea, her big neighbor for twenty-five years, the sea with its salt air, its rages, its scolding voice, its strong breezes, the sea which she sought from her window at "The Poplars" every morning, whose air she breathed day and night, the sea which she felt close to her, which she had taken to loving unconsciously as she would a person.

Winter was approaching, and Jeanne felt herself overcome by an unconquerable discouragement. It was not one of those acute griefs which seemed to wring the heart, but a dreary, mournful sadness.

Nothing roused her. No one paid any attention to her. The high road before her door stretched to right and left with hardly any passersby. Occasionally a dog-cart passed rapidly, driven by a red-faced man, with his blouse puffed out by the wind, making a sort of blue balloon; sometimes a slow-moving wagon, or else two peasants, a man and a woman, who came near, passed by, and disappeared in the distance.

As soon as the grass began to grow again, a young girl in a short skirt passed by the gate every morning with two thin cows who browsed along the side of the road. She came back every evening with the same sleepy face, making a step every ten minutes as she walked behind the animals.

Jeanne dreamed every night that she was still at "The Poplars." She seemed to be there with father and little mother and sometimes even with Aunt Lison. She did over again things forgotten and done with, thought she was supporting Madame Adelaide in her walk along the avenue. And each awakening was attended with tears.

She thought continually of Paul, wondering what he was doing—how he was—whether he sometimes thought of her. As she walked slowly in the by-roads between the farms, she thought over all these things which tormented her, but above all else, she cherished an intense jealousy of the woman who had stolen her son from her. It was this hatred alone which prevented her from taking any steps, from going to look for him, to see him. It seemed to her that she saw that woman standing on the doorsill asking: "What do you want here, madame?" Her mother's pride revolted at the possibility of such a meeting. And her haughty pride of a good woman whose character is blameless made her all the more indignant at the cowardice of a man subjugated by an unworthy passion.

When autumn returned with its long rains, its gray sky, its dark clouds, such a weariness of this kind of life came over her that she determined to make a great effort to get her Poulet back; he must have got over his infatuation by this time.

She wrote him an imploring letter:

"My Dear Child: I am going to entreat you to come back to me. Remember that I am old and delicate, all

alone the whole year round except for a servant maid. I am now living in a little house on the main road. It is very lonely, but if you were here all would be different for me. I have only you in the world, and I have not seen you for seven years! You were my life, my dream, my only hope, my one love, and you failed me, you deserted me!

"Oh, come back, my little Poulet—come and embrace me. Come back to your old mother, who holds out her despairing arms towards you.

"JEANNE."

He replied a few days later:

"MY DEAR MOTHER: I would ask nothing better than to go and see you, but I have not a penny. Send me some money and I will come. I wanted, in any case, to see you to talk to you about a plan that would make it possible for me to do as you ask.

"The disinterestedness and love of the one who has been my companion in the dark days through which I have passed can never be forgotten by me. It is not possible for me to remain any longer without publicly recognizing her love and her faithful devotion. She has very pleasing manners, which you would appreciate. She is also educated and reads a good deal. In fact, you cannot understand what she has been to me. I should be a brute if I did not show her my gratitude. I am going, therefore, to ask you to give me your permission to marry her. You will forgive all my follies and we will all live together in your new house.

"If you knew her you would at once give your consent. I can assure you that she is perfect and very distingué. You will love her, I am sure. As for me, I could not live without her.

"I shall expect your reply with impatience, my dear mother, and we both embrace you with all our heart.

"Your son,

"VICOMTE PAUL DE LAMARE."

Jeanne was crushed. She remained motionless, the letter on her lap, seeing through the cunning of this girl who had had such a hold on her son for so long, and had not let him come to see her once, biding her time until the despairing old mother could no longer resist the desire to clasp her son in her arms, and would weaken and grant all they asked.

And grief at Paul's persistent preference for this creature wrung her heart. She said: "He does not love me. He does not love me."

Rosalie just then entered the room. Jeanne faltered: "He wants to marry her now."

The maid was startled. "Oh, madame, you will not allow that. M. Paul must not pick up that rubbish."

And Jeanne, overcome with emotion, but indignant, replied: "Never that, my girl. And as he will not come here, I am going to see him, myself, and we shall see which of us will carry the day."

She wrote at once to Paul to prepare him for her visit, and to arrange to meet him elsewhere than in the house inhabited by that baggage.

While awaiting a reply she made her preparations for departure. Rosalie began to pack her mistress' clothes in an old trunk, but as she was folding a dress, one of those she had worn in the country, she exclaimed: "Why, you have nothing to put on your back. I will

not allow you to go like that. You would be a disgrace to every one; and the Parisian ladies would take you for a servant."

Jeanne let her have her own way, and the two women went together to Goderville to choose some material, which was given a dressmaker in the village. Then they went to the lawyer, M. Roussel, who spent a fortnight in the capital every year, in order to get some information; for Jeanne had not been in Paris for twenty-eight years.

He gave them lots of advice on how to avoid being run over, on methods of protecting yourself from thieves, advising her to sew her money up inside the lining of her coat, and to keep in her pocket only when she absolutely needed. He spoke at length about moderate priced restaurants, and mentioned two or three patronized by women, and told them that they might mention his name at the Hotel Normandie.

Jeanne had never yet seen the railroad, though trains had been running between Paris and Havre for six years, and were revolutionizing the whole country.

She received no answer from Paul, although she waited a week, then two weeks, going every morning to meet the postman, asking him hesitatingly: "Is there anything for me, Père Malandain?" And the man always replied in his hoarse voice: "Nothing again, my good lady."

It certainly must be this woman who was keeping Paul from writing.

Jeanne, therefore, determined to set out at once. She wanted to take Rosalie with her, but the maid refused for fear of increasing the expense of the journey. She did not allow her mistress to take more than three hundred francs, saying: "If you need more you can write to me and I will go to the lawyer and ask him to send it to you. If I give you any more, M. Paul will put it in his pocket."

One December morning Denis Lecoq came for them in his light wagon and took them to the station. Jeanne went as she kissed Rosalie good-by, and got into the train. Rosalie was also affected and said: "Good-by, madame; bon voyage, and come back soon!"

"Good-by, my girl."

A whistle and the train was off, beginning slowly and gradually going with a speed that terrified Jeanne. In her compartment there were two gentlemen leaning back in the two corners of the carriage.

She looked at the country as they swept past, the trees, the farms, the villages, feeling herself carried into a new life, into a new world that was no longer the life of her tranquil youth and of her present monotonous existence.

She reached Paris that evening. A commissionaire took her trunk and she followed him in great fear, jostled by the crowd and not knowing how to make her way amid this mass of moving humanity, almost running to keep up with the man for fear of losing sight of him.

On reaching the hotel she said at the desk: "I was recommended here by M. Roussel."

The proprietress, an immense woman with a serious face, who was seated at the desk, inquired:

"Who is he—M. Roussel?"

Jeanne replied in amazement: "Why, he is the lawyer at Goderville, who stops here every year."

"That's very possible," said the big

woman, "but I do not know him. Do you wish a room?"

"Yes, madame."

A boy took her satchel and led the way upstairs. She felt a pang at her heart. Sitting down at a little table she sent for some luncheon, as she had eaten nothing since daybreak. As she ate, she was thinking sadly of a thousand things, recalling her stay here on the return from her wedding journey, and the first indication of Julien's character betrayed while they were in Paris. But she was young then, and confident and brave. Now she felt old, embarrassed, even timid, weak and disturbed at trifles. When she had finished her luncheon she went over to the window and looked down on the street filled with people. She wished to go out, but was afraid to do so. She would surely get lost. She went to bed, but the noise, the feeling of being in a strange city, kept her awake. About two o'clock in the morning, just as she was dozing off, she heard a woman scream in an adjoining room; she sat up in bed and then she thought she heard a man laugh. As daylight dawned the thought of Paul came to her, and she dressed herself before it was light.

Paul lived in the Rue du Sauvage, in the old town. She wanted to go there on foot so as to carry out Rosalie's economical advice. The weather was delightful, the air cold enough to make her skin tingle. People were hurrying along the sidewalks. She walked as fast as she could, according to directions given her, along a street, at the end of which she was to turn to the right and then to the left, when she would come to a square where she must make fresh inquiries. She did not find the square, and went into a baker's to ask her way, and he directed her differently. She started off again, went astray, inquired her way again, and finally got lost completely.

Half crazy, she now walked at random. She had made up her mind to call a cab, when she caught sight of the Seine. She then walked along the quays.

After about an hour she found the Rue Sauvage, a sort of dark alley. She stopped at a door, so overcome that she could not move.

He was there, in that house—Poulet.

She felt her knees and hands trembling; but at last she entered the door, and walking along a passage, saw the janitor's quarters. She said, as she held out a piece of money: "Would you go up and tell M. Paul de Lamare that an old lady, a friend of his mother's, is downstairs, and wishes to see him?"

"He does not live here any longer, madame," replied the janitor.

A shudder went over her. She faltered:

"Oh! Where—where is he living now?"

"I do not know."

She grew dizzy as though she were about to fall over, and stood there for some moments without being able to speak. At length, with a great effort, she collected her senses and murmured:

"How long is it since he left?"

"About two weeks ago. They went off like that, one evening, and never came back. They were in debt everywhere in the neighborhood, so you can understand that they did not care to leave their address."

Jeanne saw lights before her eyes, flashes of flame, as though a gun had been fired off in front of her eyes. But

she had one fixed idea in her mind, and that sustained her, and kept her outwardly calm and rational. She wished to find Poulet and know all about him.

"Then he said nothing when he was going away?"

"Nothing at all; they ran off to escape their debts, that's all."

"But he surely sends some one to get his mail."

"More frequently than I send it. He never got more than ten letters a year. I took one up to them, however, two days before they left."

That was probably her letter. She said abruptly: "Listen! I am his mother, his own mother, and I have come to look for him. Here are ten francs for you. If you can get any news or any particulars about him, come and see me at the Hotel Normandie, Rue du Havre, and I will repay you well."

"You may count on me, madame," he replied.

She left him and began to walk away without caring whither she went. She hurried along as though she were on some important business, knocking up against people with packages, crossing the streets without paying attention to the approaching vehicles, and being sworn at by the drivers, stumbling on the curb of the sidewalk, and tearing along straight ahead in utter despair.

All at once she found herself in a garden, and was so tired that she sat down on a bench to rest. She stayed there some time apparently, weeping without being conscious of it, for passersby stopped to look at her. Then she felt very cold, and rose to go on her way; but her legs would scarcely carry her, she was so weak and distressed.

She wanted to go into a restaurant and get a cup of bouillon, but a sort of shame, of fear, of modesty at her grief being observed held her back. She would pause at the door, look in, see all the people sitting at table eating, and would turn away, saying: "I will go into the next one." But she had not the courage.

Finally she went into a bakery and bought a crescent and ate it as she walked along. She was very thirsty, but did not know where to go to get something to drink, so did without it.

Presently she found herself in another garden surrounded by arcades. She recognized the Palais Royal. Being tired and warm, she sat down here for an hour or two.

A crowd of people came in, a well-dressed crowd, chatting, smiling, bowing to each other, that happy crowd of beautiful women and wealthy men who live only for dress and amusement. Jeanne felt bewildered in the midst of this brilliant assemblage, and got up to make her escape. But suddenly the thought came to her that she might meet Paul in this place; and she began to wander about, looking into the faces, going and coming incessantly with her quick step from one end of the garden to the other.

People turned round to look at her, others laughed as they pointed her out. She noticed it and fled, thinking that they were doubtless amused at her appearance and at her dress of green plaid, selected by Rosalie, and made according to her ideas by the dressmaker at Goderville.

She no longer dared even to ask her way of passersby, but at last she ventured to do so and found her way back to the hotel.

The following day she went to the police department to ask them to look for her child. They could promise her nothing, but said they would do all they could. She wandered about the streets hoping that she might come across him. And she felt more alone in this bustling crowd, more lost, more wretched than in the lonely country.

That evening when she came back to the hotel she was informed that a man had come to see her from M. Paul, and that he would come back again the following day. Her heart began to beat violently and she never closed her eyes that night. If it should be he! Yes, it assuredly was, although she would not have recognized him from the description they gave her.

About nine o'clock the following morning there was a knock at the door. She cried: "Come in!" ready to throw herself into certain outstretched arms. But an unknown person appeared; and while he excused himself for disturbing her, and explained his business, which was to collect a debt of Paul's, she felt the tears beginning to overflow, and wiped them away with her finger before they fell on her cheeks.

He had learned of her arrival through the janitor of the Rue Sauvage, and as he could not find the young man, he had come to see his mother. He handed her a paper, which she took without knowing what she was doing and read the figures—ninety francs—which she paid without a word.

She did not go out that day.

The next day other creditors came. She gave them all that she had left except twenty francs and then wrote to Rosalie to explain matters to her.

She passed her days wandering about, waiting for Rosalie's answer, not knowing what to do, how to kill the melancholy, interminable hours, having no one to whom she could say an affectionate word, no one who knew her sorrow. She now longed to return home to her little house at the side of the lonely high road. A few days before she thought she could not live there, she was so overcome with grief, and now she felt that she could never live anywhere else but there where her serious character had been formed.

One evening the letter at last came, enclosing two hundred francs. Rosalie wrote:

"MADAME JEANNE: Come back at once, for I shall not send you any more. As for M. Paul, it is I who will go and get him when we know where he is.

"With respect, your servant,

"ROSALIE."

Jeanne set out for Batteville one very cold, snowy morning.

CHAPTER XIV

LIGHT AT EVENTIDE

JEANNE never went out now, never stirred about. She rose at the same hour every day, looked out at the weather and then went downstairs and sat before the parlor fire.

She would remain for days motionless, gazing into the fire, thinking of nothing in particular. It would grow dark before she stirred, except to put a fresh log on the fire. Rosalie would then bring in the lamp and exclaim: "Come, Madame Jeanne, you must stir about or you will have no appetite again this evening."

She lived over the past, haunted by memories of her early life and her wedding journey down yonder in Corsica. Forgotten landscapes in that isle now rose before her in the blaze of the fire, and she recalled all the little details, all the little incidents, the faces she had seen down there. The head of the guide, Jean Ravoli, haunted her, and she sometimes seemed to hear his voice.

Then she remembered the sweet years of Paul's childhood, when they planted salad together and when she knelt in the thick grass beside Aunt Lison, each trying what they could do to please the child, and her lips murmured: "Poulet, my little Poulet," as though she were talking to him. Stopping at this word, she would try to trace it, letter by letter, in space, sometimes for hours at a time, until she became confused and mixed up the letters and formed other words, and she became so nervous that she was almost crazy.

She had all the peculiarities of those who live a solitary life. The least thing out of its usual place irritated her.

Rosalie often obliged her to walk and took her on the high road, but at the end of twenty minutes she declared she could not take another step and sat down on the side of the road.

She soon became averse to all movement and stayed in bed as late as possible. Since her childhood she had retained one custom, that of rising the instant she had drunk her café au lait in the morning. But now she would lie down again and begin to dream, and as she was daily growing more lazy, Rosalie would come and oblige her to get up and almost force her to get dressed.

She seemed no longer to have any will power, and each time the maid asked a question or wanted her advice or opinion she would say: "Do as you think best, my girl."

She imagined herself pursued by some persistent ill luck and was like an oriental fatalist, and having seen her dreams all fade away and her hopes crushed, she would sometimes hesitate a whole day or longer before undertaking the simplest thing, for fear she might be on the wrong road and it would turn out badly. She kept repeating: "Talk of bad luck—I have never had any luck in life."

Then Rosalie would say: "What would you do if you had to work for your living, if you were obliged to get up every morning at six o'clock to go out to your work? Many people have to do that, nevertheless, and when they

grow too old they die of want."

Jeanne replied: "Remember that I am all alone; that my son has deserted me." And Rosalie would get very angry: "That's another thing! Well, how about the sons who are drafted into the army and those who go to America?"

America to her was an undefined country, where one went to make a fortune and whence one never returned. She continued: "There always comes a time when people have to part, for old people and young people are not made to live together." And she added fiercely: "Well, what would you say if he were dead?"

Jeanne had nothing more to say.

One day in spring she had gone up to the loft to look for something and by chance opened a box containing old calendars which had been preserved after the manner of some country folks.

She took them up and carried them downstairs. They were of all sizes, and she laid them out on the table in the parlor in regular order. Suddenly she spied the earliest, the one she had brought with her to "The Poplars." She gazed at it for some time, at the days crossed off by her the morning she left Rouen, the day after she left the convent, and she wept slow, sorrowful tears, the tears of an old woman at sight of her wretched life spread out before her on this table.

One morning the maid came into her room earlier than usual, and placing the bowl of café au lait on the little stand beside her bed, she said: "Come, drink it quickly. Denis is waiting for us at the door. We are going to 'The Poplars,' for I have something to attend to down there."

Jeanne dressed herself with trembling hands, almost fainting at the thought of seeing her dear home once more.

The sky was cloudless and the nag, who was inclined to be frisky, would suddenly start off at a gallop every now and then. As they entered the commune of Étouvent Jeanne's heart beat so that she could hardly breathe.

They unharnessed the horse at the Couillard place, and while Rosalie and her son were attending to their own affairs, the farmer and his wife offered to let Jeanne go over the château, as the proprietor was away and they had the keys.

She went off alone, and when she reached the side of the château from which there was a view of the sea she turned round to look. Nothing had changed on the outside. When she turned the heavy lock and went inside the first thing she did was to go up to her old room, which she did not recognize, as it had been newly papered and furnished. But the view from the window was the same, and she stood and gazed out at the landscape she had so loved.

She then wandered all over the house, walking quietly all alone in this silent abode as though it were a cemetery. All her life was buried here. She went down to the drawing-room, which was dark with its closed shutters. As her eyes became accustomed to the dim light she recognized some of the old hangings. Two easy chairs were drawn up before the fire, as if some one had just left them, and as Jeanne stood there, full of old memories, she suddenly seemed to see her father and mother sitting there, warming their feet at the fire.

She started back in terror and

knocked up against the edge of the door, against which she leaned to support herself, still staring at the armchairs.

The vision had vanished.

She remained bewildered for some minutes. Then she slowly recovered her composure and started to run away, for fear she might become insane. She chanced to look at the door against which she had been leaning and saw there "Poulet's ladder."

All the little notches were there showing the age and growth of her child. Here was the baron's writing, then hers, a little smaller, and then Aunt Lison's rather shaky characters. And she seemed to see her boy of long ago with his fair hair standing before her, leaning his little forehead against the door while they measured his height.

And she kissed the edge of the door in a frenzy of affection.

But some one was calling her outside. It was Rosalie's voice: "Madame Jeanne, Madame Jeanne, they are waiting breakfast for you." She went out in a dream and understood nothing of what they were saying to her. She ate what they gave her, heard them talking, but about what she knew not, let them kiss her on the cheeks and kissed them in return and then got into the carriage.

When they lost sight of the château behind the tall trees she felt a wrench at her heart, convinced that she had bid a last farewell to her old home.

When they reached Batteville and just as she was going into her new house, she saw something white under the door. It was a letter that the postman had slipped under the door while she was out. She recognized Paul's writing and opened it, trembling with anxiety. He wrote:

"My Dear Mother: I have not written sooner because I did not wish you to make a useless journey to Paris when it was my place to go and see you. I am just now in great sorrow and in great straits. My wife is dying after giving birth to a little girl three days ago, and I have not one sou. I do not know what to do with the child, whom my janitor's wife is bringing up on the bottle as well as she can, but I fear I shall lose her. Could you not take charge of it? I absolutely do not know what to do, and I have no money to put her out to nurse. Answer by return mail.

"Your son, who loves you,

"Paul."

Jeanne sank into a chair and had scarcely strength to call Rosalie. When the maid came into the room they read the letter over together and then remained silent for some time, face to face.

At last Rosalie said: "I am going to fetch the little one, madame. We cannot leave it like that."

"Go, my girl," replied Jeanne.

Then they were silent until the maid said: "Put on your hat, madame, and we will go to Goderville to see the lawyer. If she is going to die, the other one, M. Paul must marry her for the little one's sake later on."

Jeanne, without replying, put on her hat. A deep, inexpressible joy filled her heart, a treacherous joy that she sought to hide at any cost, one of those things of which one is ashamed, although cherishing it in one's soul—her son's sweetheart was going to die.

The lawyer gave the servant minute instructions, making her repeat them

several times. Then, sure that she could make no mistake, she said: "Do not be afraid. I will see to it now."

She set out for Paris that very night.

Jeanne passed two days in such a troubled condition that she could not think. The third morning she received merely a line from Rosalie saying she would be back on the evening train. That was all.

About three o'clock she drove in a neighbor's light wagon to the station at Beuzeville to meet Rosalie.

She stood on the platform, looking at the railroad track as it disappeared on the horizon. She looked at the clock. Ten minutes still—five minutes still—two minutes more. Then the hour of the train's arrival, but it was not in sight. Presently, however, she saw a cloud of white smoke and gradually it drew up in the station. She looked anxiously and at last perceived Rosalie carrying a sort of white bundle in her arms.

She wanted to go over toward her, but her knees seemed to grow weak and she was afraid of falling.

But the maid had seen her and came forward with her usual calm manner and said: "How do you do, madame? Here I am back again, but not without some difficulty."

"Well?" faltered Jeanne.

"Well," answered Rosalie, "she died last night. They were married and here is the little girl." And she held out the child, who could not be seen under her wraps.

Jeanne took it mechanically and they left the station and got into the carriage.

"M. Paul will come as soon as the funeral is over—to-morrow about this time, I believe," resumed Rosalie.

Jeanne murmured "Paul" and then was silent.

The wagon drove along rapidly, the peasant clacking his tongue to urge on the horse. Jeanne looked straight ahead of her into the clear sky through which the swallows darted in curves. Suddenly she felt a gentle warmth striking through to her skin; it was the warmth of the little being who was asleep on her lap.

Then she was overcome with an intense emotion, and uncovering gently the face of the sleeping infant, she raised it to her lips and kissed it passionately.

But Rosalie, happy though grumpy, stopped her: "Come, come, Madame Jeanne, stop that; you will make it cry."

And then she added, probably in answer to her own thoughts: "Life, after all, is not as good or as bad as we believe it to be."

THE END

VOLUME IV

PIERRE AND JEAN

PIERRE AND JEAN

CHAPTER I

SURPRISING NEWS

"Ah!" exclaimed Monsieur Roland abruptly after a quarter of an hour's silence, during which he had remained motionless, his eyes fixed on the water, occasionally raising his line very gently to see if he had a bite by a slight movement, feeling the line he had dropped down into the sea.

Madame Roland had been dozing at the stern by the side of Madame Rosémilly, who had been invited to join the party, but roused herself at her husband's exclamation, and, turning her head toward him, asked:

"Well, what is it, Gérôme?"

He replied in a tone of vexation:

"Can't get another bite. Since noon I've caught nothing. One ought never to go fishing with women; they delay one in starting."

His two sons, Pierre and Jean, who were sitting, one on the starboard, the other on the port side, each with a line over his forefinger, began to laugh at the same instant, and Jean replied:

"You are not very gallant to our guest, papa!"

Monsier Roland was confused, and made his excuses.

"I beg pardon, Madame Rosémilly, but I cannot help it. I invite ladies because I like their company, but as soon as I find myself on the water, I think of nothing but fish."

Madame Roland was now wide awake, and was gazing with a softened air at the wide stretch of cliffs and sea. She murmured:

"Still, you have had good sport."

Her husband shook his head in negation, while he cast a satisfied glance at the basket where the fish, caught by the three men, were still gasping weakly with a low sound of sticky scales and quivering fins, of weak, ineffectual struggles, as they opened their mouths in the deadly air.

Monsier Roland took the hamper between his knees and tipped it till the silver flood of creatures reached the edge, in order to see those at the bottom. They gasped more perceptibly in their death agony, and their pungent odor, the wholesome smell of the sea, arose from the full basket.

The old fisherman inhaled it greedily, as if it were the scent of roses, and declared:

"By George! They are fresh, these fellows," and then continued:

"How many have you caught, doctor?"

The elder son, Pierre, a man of thirty, with black whiskers closely trimmed, but without mustache, replied:

"Not many. Three or four."

The father turned to the younger son.

"And you, Jean?"

Jean, a tall, light-haired youth, with a full beard, and considerably younger than his brother, smiled as he answered:

"About the same as Pierre. Four or five."

They always told him the same lies, and delighted the old fellow beyond measure.

He rolled his line round a rowlock, and, crossing his arms, announced:

"I'll never again try to fish in the afternoon. After ten o'clock, it is all over. The rascals will not bite; they take a siesta in the sun."

The good man looked at the surrounding sea with the satisfied air of a proprietor.

He had been a jeweler in Paris, but an irresistible love of sailing and fishing dragged him from his counter as soon as he had acquired a modest competence. He left Paris and betook himself to Havre, where he bought a boat and became an amateur sailor. His two sons, Pierre and Jean, remained in Paris to continue their studies, and came occasionally, during vacation, to share their father's amusements.

The elder son, Pierre, five years older than Jean, on leaving college had felt a vocation for various professions in succession. He tried half a dozen, one after another, and, quickly disgusted with each, plunged at once into new attempts.

Finally, medicine tempted him, and he set to work with such ardor that he received his degree as doctor after a brief course of study, further shortened by exemptions granted by the authorities. He was intelligent, changeable and tenacious, full of utopian and philosophical ideas.

Jean, as fair as Pierre was dark, as calm as his brother was excitable, as sweet tempered as his brother was spiteful, had quietly studied law, and obtained his diploma at the same time that Pierre graduated in medicine.

Both were now taking a holiday with their family, and both had formed the project of establishing themselves at Havre, if they could succeed in doing so satisfactorily.

But a vague jealousy—one of those dormant jealousies which grow up almost invisibly between brothers or sisters, till they mature and burst forth on the occasion of a marriage or of a piece of good luck happening to one—kept them on the alert in a state of fraternal and inoffensive hostility. They certainly loved each other, but they spied on each other. Pierre, who was five years old when Jean was born, regarded, with the dislike of a spoiled little animal, this other little animal, which suddenly appeared in the arms of his father and mother, and was so caressed and beloved by them.

Jean had been from childhood a model of gentleness, goodness, and even temper; and Pierre gradually became wearied of hearing the continual praise of his big brother, for to him his gentleness seemed effeminacy, his goodness, foolishness and his kindness, blindness. His parents, good, easy people, who dreamed of their sons occupying honorable commonplace positions, reproached him with his fickleness, his enthusiasms, his abortive attempts, all his ineffective impulses toward larger ideas and the ornamental arts.

After he attained manhood, they no longer said to him, "Look at Jean, and follow his example," but whenever he heard, "Jean did this, Jean did that,"

he understood clearly this hidden allusion, and the meaning of the words.

Their mother, a good housewife, rather sentimental, was continually appeasing the little rivalries that sprang up every day between her two big sons, over little matters of everyday life. At this moment her peace of mind was disturbed by a trifling event which she feared might lead to a complication. During the winter, while her sons were completing their special studies, she made the acquaintance of a neighbor, Madame Rosémilly, widow of a ship captain who had died at sea two years before. She was quite young, only twenty-three, a capable woman, who knew life by instinct like a wild animal, as if she had seen, experienced, comprehended and weighed all possible events, of which she formed an estimate in a sound, narrow and benevolent spirit. She had fallen into the habit of coming over in the evening with her embroidery to chat with her neighbors, who always offered her a cup of tea.

Monsieur Roland, whose craze for a sailor's life was taking a greater hold of him, inquired about the deceased captain from their new friend, and she spoke of him, of his voyages, his old yarns, without embarrassment, like a sensible woman resigned to her loss, who loves life and respects death.

The sons, on their return home, finding this pretty widow installed in the house, at once began to pay her attention, less through a desire to please her than from a longing to supplant each other.

Their mother, with her practical common sense, hoped that one of them would be successful, for the young widow was rich, but she did not wish the other brother to feel hurt.

Madame Rosémilly was a blonde, with blue eyes, a crown of fluffy hair that fluttered in the slightest breeze, and a little bold, defiant air which was not in keeping with her sensible disposition.

She seemed already to prefer Jean, attracted to him by a similarity of character. This preference, however, was only shown by an almost imperceptible difference in voice and look, and by the fact that she sometimes took his advice.

She seemed to divine that Jean's opinion would agree with hers, while that of Pierre would as surely be different. When she spoke about the doctor's ideas in politics, art, philosophy or morals, she would occasionally say "Your nonsense." Then he would look at her with the cold stare of a magistrate who is preparing an indictment against all women, poor creatures.

Before the return of his sons, Monsieur Roland had never invited her to go out fishing; nor, indeed, did he ever take his wife with him, for he liked to set out at daybreak with Captain Beausire, an old skipper whom he had met on the quay at high tide, and who had become an intimate friend, and the old sailor, Papagris, commonly called Jean Bart, who was the boatkeeper.

One evening in the preceding week, Madame Rosémilly, who had dined with them, observed, "Fishing must be amusing, is it not?" and the retired jeweler, flattered in his ruling passion, and possessed with a desire to make converts, exclaimed:

"Will you come with us?"

"Oh, yes."

"Next Tuesday?"

"Yes, next Tuesday."

"Have you the courage to start at five in the morning?"

"Oh, no, certainly not!" she cried in astonishment.

He was disappointed and chilled and began to doubt her earnestness. Nevertheless, he asked:

"At what hour can you start?"

"Well—at nine!"

"Not before?"

"No, not before. Even that is too early!"

Monsieur Roland hesitated. They would certainly not catch anything, for when the sun is bright the fish do not bite; but the two brothers were zealous in making all the arrangements and settling everything at once.

On the following Tuesday the *Pearl* cast anchor beneath the white rocks of the cape of La Hêve; they fished with success till noon, then rested, and fished again without catching anything, and Roland, discovering somewhat late in the day that Madame Rosémilly really cared for nothing but the sail, and, seeing that there was no sign of a nibble at his lines, uttered, in an access of unreasoning impatience, an energetic "Bah!" which was addressed as much to the uninterested widow as to the fish that would not be caught.

He was at present engaged in gazing on the captured fish, with the trembling joy of a miser; then he looked at the sky and remarked that the sun was sinking.

"Well, boys," he said, "shall we go back toward shore?"

The sons both drew in their lines, reeled them, cleaned their hooks, and stuck them into their corks, and then waited.

Monsieur Roland stood up to look at the horizon in seafaring style.

"No more wind," he said; "we must row, my lads."

Then, with his arm pointing to the north, he added:

"Look, there's the Southampton packet."

The smooth sea lay stretched out like a piece of blue cloth, boundless, gleaming with reflections of gold and fire, and away in the direction indicated a blackish cloud ascended against the rosy sky. Below it was seen the ship, which at such a distance seemed quite small. Southward were numerous other clouds of smoke, all approaching the pier of Havre, the white line of which, with its tall, erect lighthouse at the end, was scarcely visible.

Roland asked:

"Isn't the *Normandie* due to-day?"

Jean replied:

"Yes, papa."

"Give me my glass. I believe she is down there."

He pulled out the brass tube, adjusted the instrument to his eye, and then, delighted at seeing her, exclaimed:

"Yes, yes, it is the *Normandie;* I recognize her two smokestacks! Will you have a look, Madame Rosémilly?"

She took the glass and turned it toward the distant American steamer, doubtless without bringing it into the field, for she could distinguish nothing but some blue with a circle of color, a round rainbow, and then strange objects, like a kind of eclipses, which made her feel quite sick.

She returned the glass with the words:

"I never could use that instrument, and it always provoked my husband, for

he would remain for hours at the window watching the ships pass."

Monsieur Roland was vexed as he replied:

"It must be the fault of your eyes, for my glass is a very good one."

Then he offered it to his wife.

"Will you take a look?"

"No, thank you; I know beforehand that I could not see."

Madame Roland, a woman of forty-eight, who did not show her age, seemed to enjoy, more than the rest, the sail and the close of the day.

Her chestnut hair had just commenced to whiten. She had a calm, thoughtful air—a happy, kindly air pleasant to see. According to a remark of her son Pierre, she knew the price of money, which did not prevent her from enjoying the charm of revery. She loved to read romances and poetry, not for their value as works of art, but for the tender and melancholy dreaminess they awoke in her. A verse, often commonplace, often bad, set the little chord in vibration, as she would say, and gave her the feeling of a mysterious desire almost realized. She felt a pleasure in these light emotions that somewhat troubled her soul, which was as well kept as an account book.

Since her arrival at Havre she had become visibly stouter and this made her once slender and supple figure rather heavy.

This excursion on the water had charmed her. Her husband, without being ill-natured, bullied her just as despots in an office bully underlings, without anger or dislike, and with whom a command is like an oath. In the presence of strangers he restrained himself, but in his family he was not so careful, and assumed terrible airs, although he was afraid of everybody. She, in her dislike of noise, scenes and useless explanations, always yielded and never asked for anything; she had not dared even ask, for a long time back, to join in a sail. It was with joy, then, that she seized this occasion, and tasted this rare and novel pleasure.

From the time they left the shore, she gave herself up utterly, body and soul, to the enjoyment of gently gliding over the water. She did not think, she did not dwell on memories or hopes; it seemed to her that her heart, like her body, was floating over something soft, fluid, delicious, which lulled her into apathy.

When the father gave the order, "Come, get to your oars," she smiled as she saw her two big sons take off their jackets and roll up their shirt-sleeves.

Pierre, who was nearest the two ladies, took the starboard oar, Jean that on the larboard side, and they waited till the master cried, "Oars all!" for he stickled about having these manœuvres executed according to rule.

Then, at one dash, they dipped their oars, and swung back with all their force, and tried to rival each other in the vigor of their strokes. They had set out quietly, with sails set, but the breeze had fallen, and the masculine pride of the two brothers was at once aroused at the prospect of measuring their strength against each other.

Whenever they went fishing with their father alone, they rowed without the rudder, for Roland prepared the lines while watching the course of the boat, which he guided by a word or gesture. "Easy, Jean." "Now, Pierre, pull," or

perhaps he would say, "Come, *one,* now *two,* more elbow grease." Then the lazy one pulled stronger, and the other took it more easily, till the boat resumed a straight course.

To-day they wanted to show their muscle. Pierre's arms were hairy, rather thin but nervous; those of Jean, plump and white, rather pink, with a mass of muscles that played beneath the skin.

Pierre had the advantage at first. With teeth set, brow wrinkled, legs stretched, hands clenching the oar, he made it bend at every stroke, and the *Pearl* would swerve aside. Monsieur Roland, sitting in the bow to leave the stern to the ladies, roared out, "Easy, number *one;* pull, number *two.*" Then number *one* pulled harder, and *two* could not reply to his disorderly stroke.

At length the captain gave the word "Stop." The two oars rose together, and Jean, by his father's orders, pulled a few strokes alone. But from that moment he had the advantage; he grew animated and heated, while Pierre, out of breath and exhausted by his rash efforts, grew weak. Four times Monsieur Roland made them stop in order to give the elder time to recover his wind, and to get the boat on her course. The doctor, his forehead covered with perspiration, his cheeks pale and vexed and humiliated, stammered out:

"I do not know what ails me. I have a spasm at the heart. I started in very well, but that has strained my arm."

Jean asked, "Would you like me to take both oars?"

"No, thanks. It will soon pass."

Madame Roland, in a tone of annoyance, said:

"Now, Pierre, what is the sense of putting yourself into such a condition? You are not a baby now."

He shrugged his shoulders and resumed his rowing.

Madame Rosémilly pretended not to see, notice, or hear anything. Her little blonde head, at every movement of the boat, gave a pretty little toss backward, which shook the soft hair on her temples.

But Monsieur Roland cried, "Hallo, there's the *Prince Albert* overtaking us!" They all looked. Long, low, with its two smokestacks sloping astern, and its two yellow paddle boxes like round cheeks, the Southampton packet came on at full speed, her deck covered with passengers and open parasols; her swift, noisy paddlewheels struck the water, making it foam, and giving her an air of haste, as of a special courier; while her upright bows cut the sea into two swelling waves, which glided, thin and transparent, along her sides.

When she was quite near the *Pearl,* Monsieur Roland lifted his hat, the two ladies waved their handkerchiefs, and the greeting was answered by half a dozen parasols waved from the steamer as she passed on, leaving a few slow waves behind her, on the tranquil and gleaming surface of the sea.

Other steamers came into view, hastening from all points of the compass to the short white dock, which swallowed them up, one after the other. Fishing boats and large sailing vessels, with their slender masts gliding against the sky, in tow of almost invisible tugs, all approached, slowly or swiftly, that devouring ogre, which at intervals seemed gorged to satiety, and would vomit forth to sea another fleet of steamers, brigs, schooners, and three-masters, with their network of masts

and spars. The steamers sped on, right or left, over the smooth bosom of the ocean, while the sailing ships, cast off by the tugs that had hauled them out, remained motionless, spreading from topmast to foremast their white or brown canvas, which seemed red in the setting sun.

Madame Roland, her eyes half closed, murmured:

"How beautiful the sea is!"

Madame Rosémilly replied, with a prolonged sigh, which, however, had no sadness in it:

"Yes, but it does plenty of mischief sometimes."

Roland exclaimed:

"There's the *Normandie* going into port. Is she not huge?"

Then he told all about the opposite coast yonder on the other side of the mouth of the Seine—which was twenty kilometres wide, that mouth, he said. He pointed out Villerville, Trouville, Houlgate, Luc, Arromanches, the river of Caen, and the rocks of Calvados, which render navigation dangerous as far as Cherbourg. Then he discussed the sandbanks of the Seine, which shift at every tide, and mislead even the pilots of Quillebœuf if they do not examine the channel every day. He bade them remark that Havre separated Upper and Lower Normandy. In Lower Normandy the flat coast, consisting of pasture lands, meadows and fields, slopes down to the water's edge. The coast of Upper Normandy, on the other hand, descends by steep, precipitous cliffs full of clefts and indentations to the sea, forming an immense white wall as far as Dunkirk, every cleft containing a village or a port—Étretat, Fécamp, Saint Valery, Tréport, Dieppe and so on.

The two ladies, who were in a state of apathetic comfort, were not listening; they did not speak, for they were somewhat overpowered by the vast expanse of air and water, and by the calm magnificence of the sunset. Roland, alone, never stopped talking; he was one of those whom nothing affects. Women, more nervous, sometimes feel that the sound of a useless voice is as irritating as an impertinence.

Pierre and Jean, now pacified, rowed on slowly, and the *Pearl* advanced to the harbor, looking diminutive by the side of the large ships.

When she touched the quay, the sailor, Papagris, who was waiting for them, assisted the ladies to land, and the party entered the town. A numerous, quiet crowd, the crowd that goes to the pier every day at high water, was also returning townward.

Mesdames Roland and Rosémilly led the way, followed by the three men. As they went up the Rue de Paris, they paused occasionally before a milliner's or goldsmith's shop to look at a hat or a trinket, and, after an exchange of ideas, resumed their walk.

Before the Place de la Bourse, Roland, as he did every day, looked at the merchants' dock, which was filled with ships and led into other docks, where the large hulls, with their sides touching, lay four or five deep. The countless masts along the many miles extent of quays, the masts with their yards, their vanes, and their ropes, gave to this opening in the middle of the town the aspect of a great dead forest. Above this leafless wood the gulls were circling, watching for all the refuse cast in the water, and dropping on it like a

falling stone. A ship boy, who was fixing a pulley at one end of the yards, looked as if he had climbed up to get a bird's nest.

"Will you take dinner with us, to finish the day together?" said Madame Roland to Madame Rosémilly.

"Yes, with pleasure. I accept informally. It would be melancholy to go home alone this evening."

Pierre, who had heard the remark, and whom the indifference of the young widow began to annoy, muttered, "Humph! the widow is putting on airs now." For some days he had called her the "widow." The word meant nothing, but the tone in which it was uttered seemed to him ill-natured and slighting.

The three men did not say another word until they reached their home. It was a narrow, two-story house, in the Rue Belle-Normande. The servant, Josephine, a country girl of about nineteen, at low wages, in whom the startled, animal look of the peasantry was exaggerated, opened the door, closed it after them, and followed her master to the reception room on the first floor. Then she said:

"A gentleman has been here three times."

Monsieur Roland, who never spoke to her without shouting and cursing, cried:

"Who is it that's been here? confound it!"

She was not disturbed at any time by these outbursts of her master, and continued:

"A gentleman from the notary."

"What notary?"

"Well, Monsieur Canu."

"And what did the gentleman say?"

"That Monsieur Canu would come himself this evening."

Monsieur Lecanu was the notary, and, to some extent, the friend of Roland, whose business he transacted. For him to announce a visit in the evening argued some urgent and important affair. The Rolands all looked at each other, as worried at this news, as people of small means always are at the intervention of a lawyer, who awakens in their minds a host of ideas about contracts, legacies, lawsuits and other things agreeable or disagreeable. After some seconds, Roland murmured:

"What can this mean?"

Madame Rosémilly began to laugh.

"Why, it is a legacy, I'm sure. I bring good luck."

They were not, however, expecting the death of any one who was likely to leave them anything.

Madame Roland, blessed with an excellent memory for pedigrees, at once began to recall to mind all the marriages on her own and her husband's side, and to trace out the connections and the various branches of cousins.

She asked, before even taking off her hat:

"Tell me, father" (she called her husband "father" at home, and sometimes "Monsieur Roland" before strangers), "tell me, father, do you remember whom Joseph Lebru married when he took a second wife?"

"Yes, a little Dumenil, daughter of a paper manufacturer."

"Has he any children?"

"Four or five, at the least, I believe."

"No; there is nothing from that quarter."

She was becoming eager in this inquiry, and clung to this prospect of a little competence falling to them from

the sky. But Pierre, who loved his mother dearly, who knew her to be somewhat of a dreamer, and feared if her illusions were shattered, and the news, instead of being good, should turn out bad, that she would be annoyed and saddened, checked her by saying:

"Do not indulge in romance, mamma; there are no more rich American uncles. For my part, I should sooner believe that it is about a marriage for Jean."

All were surprised at the idea, and Jean was somewhat annoyed that his brother should have spoken of such a thing before Madame Rosémilly.

"Why for me rather than for you? Your supposition is open to question. You are the oldest; you would be the first to be thought of. And then, as for me, I do not want to marry."

Pierre giggled.

"You must be in love, then?"

The other, annoyed, replied:

"Must one be in love to say that one does not want to marry yet?"

"Good. The 'yet' explains all. You are waiting."

"Let us grant that I am waiting, if you like."

M. Roland, who had listened and reflected, all at once found the most probable solution.

"By Jove! we are all stupid to rack our brains thus. Monsieur Lecanu is a friend of ours. He knows that Pierre is looking for a doctor's office, and Jean for a lawyer's office: he has found how to place one of you."

This was so simple and probable that everybody agreed.

"Dinner is ready," said the maid. All went to their rooms to wash their hands before sitting down to table.

Ten minutes later they were seated in the little dining-room on the ground floor.

They did not talk much at first, but after a few minutes Roland once more expressed his surprise at the visit of the notary.

"In brief, why did he not write? Why did he send his clerk three times? Why is he coming himself?"

Pierre thought this quite natural.

"He wants an immediate answer, and perhaps he has to communicate some confidential matter, which one does not care to put in writing."

They remained, however, preoccupied, and somewhat out of sorts at having invited Madame Rosémilly to dinner, for it would prevent them from freely discussing the matter and forming their plans.

They had just ascended to the drawing-room when the notary was announced.

Roland rushed to meet him.

"Good-day, my dear maître."

He used the word *maître,* which is a title given to lawyers in France.

Madame Rosémilly rose.

"I am going home. I am very tired."

They feebly attempted to detain her, but she did not consent, and went off alone, without any of the three gentlemen escorting her as usual.

Madame Roland was very attentive to the newcomer.

"A cup of coffee, Monsieur Lecanu?"

"No, thanks. I have just risen from table."

"A cup of tea, then?"

"I will not say no, but a little later. We must first talk business."

In the profound silence which followed these words nothing but the rhythmical ticking of the clock was

heard, and the noise from the lower story of the dishes being washed by the girl, who was too stupid to even listen at keyholes.

The lawyer began.

"Did you know at Paris a certain Monsieur Maréchal—Léon Maréchal?"

M. and Madame Roland uttered the same exclamation, "Of course I did."

"He was one of your friends?"

Roland declared:

"Our best, sir; but a rabid Parisian. He never was away from the boulevard. He was head clerk in the treasurer's office. I never saw him after I left the capital. Then we ceased to write to each other. You know when one lives far apart——"

The lawyer continued gravely:

"Monsieur Maréchal is dead."

Husband and wife made the same little gesture of sorrowful surprise, real or feigned, with which such news is received.

M. Lecanu continued:

"My colleague in Paris has just communicated to me the chief clause in his will, making your son, Monsieur Jean Roland, his sole legatee."

So great was their astonishment that no one had a word to say.

Madame Roland was the first to master her emotion, and stammered out:

"*Mon Dieu!* Poor Léon—our friend. *Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!* Dead!"

Tears glistened in her eyes, those silent tears of women that spring from the soul and overflow the cheek, and seem so mournful because they are so limpid.

Roland, however, thought less of the sadness of the loss than of the hope it held out. Still he dared not immediately ask about the clauses of the will, or the amount of the fortune; but in order to approach to the interesting question indirectly, he asked:

"What was the cause of poor Maréchal's death?"

M. Lecanu was completely ignorant.

"I only know," he said, "that, dying without direct heirs, he leaves all his fortune, twenty thousand francs per annum placed out at three per cent. interest, to your second son, whom he saw born and grow up, and whom he deemed deserving of this legacy. Should Monsieur Jean refuse to accept the legacy, the property will go to the orphan asylum."

"That's a noble idea. If I had had no children I certainly would not have forgotten him, either—my dear friend."

The lawyer smiled.

"I was very much gratified," he said, "at being able to announce the matter personally. It is always a pleasure to bring people good news."

He did not give a thought to the fact that this good news was the death of a friend, of the best friend of M. Roland, who himself had suddenly forgotten the intimacy which he had just proclaimed with such conviction.

Madame Roland and her sons alone preserved a sorrowful countenance. She continued to weep quietly, and to wipe her eyes with her handkerchief, which she then placed to her lips to check her heavy sighs.

The doctor, in low tones, observed:

"He was a good fellow, very kindly disposed. He often asked us to dinner, my brother and me."

Jean, his large eyes open and sparkling, with a gesture habitual to him, clasped his beautiful beard in his right

hand, and slid it through his fingers.

He opened his lips twice to utter some suitable phrase, but could think of nothing, and finally said:

"He was very fond of me indeed, and always kissed me when I went to see him."

But the father's thoughts were galloping, galloping round about the legacy, just announced, and already acquired, round this money hidden behind the door, which would come in at once, to-morrow, as soon as the words "I accept" were uttered.

He asked:

"There is no possible difficulty? no suit? no contest?"

M. Lecanu was quite at his ease.

"My colleague in Paris describes the situation as absolutely uncomplicated. We only want Monsieur Jean to accept."

"Good, then; and the fortune is quite clear?"

"Quite clear."

"All formalities have been gone through?"

"All."

Suddenly the old jeweler felt a touch of shame—a vague, instinctive, transitory shame—at his haste in reassuring himself, and continued:

"You understand, of course, that if I ask you all these things at once, it is to spare my son annoyances which he might not foresee. Sometimes there are debts, embarrassments, how can I tell? And one finds one's self entangled in a labyrinth of complications. In fact, although I am not the legatee, I think of the little one before all."

In the home circle Jean was always called "the little one," although he was much taller than Pierre.

Madame Roland suddenly seemed to come out of a dream, to recall something far away, almost forgotten, which she had heard at some time and was not sure of, and she stammered out:

"Did you not say that our poor friend Maréchal had left his fortune to my little Jean?"

"Yes, madame."

She replied simply:

"It gives me great pleasure, for it proves that he loved us."

Roland rose.

"Do you wish, dear sir, that my son should sign at once the deed of acceptation?"

"No—no, Monsieur Roland. To-morrow—to-morrow, at my office at two o'clock, if that suits you."

"Yes—yes; certainly."

Then Madame Roland, who had also risen, and was smiling after her tears took two steps toward the lawyer, laid her hand on the back of his armchair and, gazing on him with the tender look of a grateful mother, asked:

"That cup of tea, Monsieur Lecanu?"

"I will take it now, gladly, madame, with pleasure."

The servant was called, and brought in first those dry crackers in tin boxes —those tasteless, hard English biscuits that seemed made for parrots' beaks, then went for some colored napkins, folded in little squares—those tea napkins which are never washed in thrifty families. She came in a third time with the sugar bowl and the cups; then she went out to boil the water.

The company waited.

No one could speak; they all had too much to think of and nothing to say. Madame Roland alone made some commonplace remarks. She told about the

fishing party, and praised the *Pearl* and Madame Rosémilly.

"Charming, charming woman!" repeated the lawyer.

Roland, leaning his back against the marble chimneypiece as in winter when the fire is burning, his hands in his pockets, his lips puckered up as if to whistle, could not keep still, as he was tortured with an imperious desire to give vent to his joy.

The two brothers, in similar armchairs, their legs crossed in the same fashion, sat at right and left of the central round table, looking straight before them in similar attitudes, but with different expressions.

The tea appeared at last. The lawyer took, sugared and drank his tea, after crumbling into it a little cracker too hard to bite. Then he rose, shook hands, and left.

"The arrangement is, then," repeated Roland, "to-morrow at your office, two o'clock."

"That is right; to-morrow, two o'clock."

Jean had not said a word.

After the departure of the lawyer there was again silence, till Roland, Senior, clapped his two hands on the two shoulders of his younger son, exclaiming:

"Well, you deuced lucky dog, why don't you embrace me?"

Jean smiled and kissed his father, saying:

"That did not seem indispensable."

But the father could not restrain himself for joy. He walked about, thrummed on the furniture with his clumsy fingers, pirouetted on his heels, and repeated:

"What luck! what luck! Here's luck indeed!"

Pierre asked:

"You knew Maréchal well, then, at one time?"

His father replied:

"By Jove! he passed all his evenings at our house. Don't you remember that he went to the college to fetch you on holidays and often took you back again after dinner? Why, the very day Jean was born, it was he who went to get the doctor! He had breakfasted with us when your mother felt ill. We knew at once what was the matter, and off he went at a run. In his hurry he took my hat instead of his own. I remember that, because we laughed a good deal about it afterward. It is even likely he remembered this circumstance when he was dying, and, as he had no heir, said to himself: 'I contributed my assistance when the little fellow was born, and now I'll leave him my fortune.'"

Madame Roland, buried in a deep easy-chair, seemed lost in memories. She murmured as if she were thinking aloud:

"Ah! he was a noble friend, devoted, faithful; a rare man, as times are now."

Jean rose. "I am going to take a little walk," he said.

His father was surprised and wished to detain him, for they had to talk, to make plans, to form resolutions. But the young man was obstinate, alleging an appointment. Besides, there would be plenty of time to come to an understanding before the legacy came into his possession.

But Jean was obstinate, pretending he had an appointment. He went away, for he longed to be alone, in order to reflect. Pierre, in his turn, said he was

going out, and some minutes later followed his brother.

When Roland was alone with his wife he took her in his arms, kissed her half a score of times on each cheek, and, in reply to a reproach she often had made to him, said:

"You see, my darling, that it would have been no good for me to stay longer in Paris, and work myself to death for the children, in place of coming here to recover my health, since a fortune has dropped to us out of the clouds."

She became very serious.

"It falls from the clouds for Jean," she said; "but Pierre?"

"Pierre! why, he's a doctor, he will make—money—and then his brother will do something for him."

"No. He would not take anything. Besides, the legacy is for Jean, nobody but Jean. Pierre, you see, finds himself at great disadvantage."

Poor Roland seemed perplexed.

"Then, we will leave him the most in our will."

"No. That would not be just, either," she cried out.

"Ah, pshaw! What then? What do you want me to do? You are always looking out for something unpleasant. You spoil all my enjoyment. I'm off to bed. Good-night. All the same, it is a stroke of good luck, right down good luck!"

He went his way, enchanted in spite of everything, and without a word of regret for the friend who died so generously.

Madame Roland returned again to dream beside the lamp which was now smoking.

CHAPTER II

PIERRE IS PUZZLED

As soon as he was out of doors, Pierre turned his steps toward the Rue de Paris, Havre's principal thoroughfare—well-lighted, animated and noisy. The rather fresh breeze coming from the sea played about his face, while he walked slowly, his cane under his arm, and his hands behind his back.

Somehow he felt ill at ease—dull, disappointed, like one who has heard bad news. This unpleasant impression had not been formulated into thought, and had he been suddenly called upon he would have been puzzled to have told the cause of this heaviness of spirit, this torpor of body. He was out of sorts—suffering from an uneasy feeling he could not explain. He had within him somewhere a sensitive spot, a scarcely perceptible moral wound that he could not place his finger upon, but which, nevertheless, annoyed, fatigued, saddened and irritated him; an unnamed and trifling trouble, a mere foreboding of sorrow.

Arrived at the Place du Théâtre, he felt attracted by the lights of the Café Tortoni, and slowly sauntered up to the

illuminated façade; but just as he was about entering, he reflected that he might encounter friends and acquaintances—people with whom he would be compelled to converse—and a sudden repugnance for this commonplace good-fellowship of *demi-tasses* and *petits verres* took possession of him. Then, retracing his steps, he again followed the main thoroughfare in the direction of the harbor.

He asked himself, "Where shall I go?" seeking some new place that would be agreeable to him in his present frame of mind. He did not find any, for he felt annoyed at being alone, and still did not wish to meet any one.

On reaching the principal quay he hesitated a moment and then turned toward the pier: he had decided in favor of solitude.

As he passed near a bench on the breakwater, he stopped and sat down, tired of walking and disgusted with his proposed promenade.

Again he asked himself, "What is the matter with me this evening?" and set to work to recollect what disappointment he had met with, much as one interrogates a patient to determine the cause of his fever.

He was at once excitable and thoughtful—at one moment in a quandary, the next in full possession of his logical powers, approving or blaming his impulsive actions; but, in the end, his original nature always gained the upper hand—the man of feeling dominating the man of intellect.

He now sought to discover the reason of his temporary weakness; of the necessity he felt to keep moving without any object in view; of the desire to meet some one who would disagree with him at the same time that he had a disinclination for the society of those he might see, and a distaste for what they might say to him.

At last he put this question to himself:

"Could it be Jean's inheritance?"

"Yes, that might, after all, have been the cause of his discomfort. When the lawyer had brought the news, he had felt his heart beat a little faster than usual. We are certainly not always masters of ourselves, but are subject to spontaneous and persistent emotions against which we struggle in vain.

He reflected deeply on this physiological problem—the impression produced by an event on the psychic individuality, and creating within one a current of ideas and sensations, joyful or painful, the opposite of what the Thinking Being desires, demands or considers good and wholesome—the Thinking Being, which is its superior through the cultivation of the intellect.

He tried to picture to himself the state of mind of a son who inherits a large fortune, and who is about to test many longed-for pleasures, hitherto forbidden by a father's avarice—a father whom he nevertheless loved and pitied.

He rose and walked toward the end of the pier. He already felt better, glad to have understood—to have surprised himself, as it were, and unveiled the other personality that is within us.

"So I was jealous of Jean," he thought; "certainly a rather unworthy sentiment. I am sure of it now, for the first thought that came into my head related to his marriage with Madame Rosémilly. I don't fancy that sensible little goose, who seems made to disgust one with sound sense and goodness.

Thus it is uncalled-for envy—its very essence—that which is because it is! I must beware of it."

He had reached the signal-mast that indicates the depth of water in the harbor, and lit a match in order to read the list of ships that had been signaled outside and were waiting to come in with the next tide. Steamers were expected from Brazil, La Plata, Chili and Japan, besides two Danish brigs, a Norwegian schooner, and a Turkish steamer. This latter announcement surprised Pierre as much as if he had read of a Swiss steamer, and caused him to conjure up the vision of a large vessel swarming with men in turbans, who sprang up the rigging in wide trousers.

"But how stupid of me," he thought; "the Turks are a seafaring people."

A few steps farther on he stopped to look at the bay. On his right, above Sainte Adresse, the two electric lighthouses of Cape de la Hêve, like a monstrous twin Cyclops, darting across the water their continued powerful glances. The two parallel rays of light resembling the giant tails of two comets reached in a straight line of limitless length from the summit of the hill to the edge of the horizon. On the two piers, two other lights—the children of these Colossi—marked the entrance to the harbor; while yonder, across the Seine, could be seen still others, some steady and others intermittent, with brilliant flashes and dark eclipses, opening and closing like eyes—the eyes of harbors, yellow, red, green, watching over the dark sea covered with ships; living eyes of the hospitable shore, saying by the simple mechanical movement of their lids:

"It is I; I am Trouville; I am Honfleur; I am the river of Pont Audemer."

And overlooking all the others, so high up and so far off that it could easily be mistaken for a planet, the aerial lighthouse of Étouville, lighting the way to Rouen across the sandbanks at the mouth of the great river.

Then on the deep, boundless sea, darker than the heavens, here and there stars seemed visible. They trembled in the nocturnal mist—small, near, and distant, and also white, red, or green; generally they were motionless, but some seemed to move. They were the lights on vessels at anchor that were waiting for the rising tide, or on those still in motion that were seeking an anchorage.

Just then the moon rose behind the town. It, too, looked like some huge, celestial beacon, placed in the heavens to guide the immeasurable flotilla of stars.

Pierre said, half aloud:

"And yet we allow ourselves to be annoyed by trifles."

Suddenly, quite close to him, a shadow—a great, fantastic shadow glided into the wide, black opening between the two piers. Leaning over the granite parapet, he saw a fishing boat coming in without hum of voices, sounds of waves, or splashing of oars, gently gliding along, its tall brown sail filled with the breeze from the ocean.

"If one could live on that boat," he thought, "perhaps one's mind might be calm."

Then, advancing a few steps farther, he saw a man seated at the end of the mole.

Was he a dreamer, a lover, a sage, a happy man, or an unhappy one? Which was he? He came nearer, curious to

see the face of this solitary watcher. In a second he recognized his brother.

"What! Is it you, Jean?"

"What! Pierre? What are you doing here?"

"Getting a breath of fresh air. And you?"

Jean began to laugh.

"I am following your example."

And Pierre sat down by the side of his brother.

"Is it not beautiful?"

"Yes."

From the tone of his voice Pierre understood that Jean had not been looking at what was around him. He continued:

"When I come here I have a wild longing to go away with these ships—to the north, or to the south. Only to think that those lights yonder come from every quarter of the globe—from the lands with gigantic flowers and beautiful pale, or copper-colored girls; the lands of humming birds, elephants, roaring lions, negro kings; from all the lands that furnish fairy tales for those of us who no longer believe in 'Sindbad the Sailor' or the 'Sleeping Beauty'! Wouldn't it be splendid to be able to treat one's self to a journey there? But that would take money, and a good deal of it——"

He stopped suddenly, all at once remembering that his brother now had the necessary means, and that, liberated from every care—from daily toil—free, without trammels of any kind, happy, joyous, he could go where fancy might dictate, toward the home of Swedish blondes or of Havanese brunettes.

Then one of those involuntary thoughts, common with him, so sudden, so rapid, that they could neither be foreseen, checked, nor modified, came to him as from the mind of a second, independent and powerful personality.

"Bah! he is too stupid; he will marry the little Rosémilly."

He had risen to his feet.

"I leave you to dream of your future; I feel the need of exercise."

He pressed his brother's hand, and continued in cordial tones:

"Well, little Jean, you are now wealthy. I am glad that I met you alone to-night, to tell you how pleased I am, how heartily I congratulate you, and how much I love you."

"Thanks, thanks, my good Pierre, thanks!" stammered Jean, his gentle, sympathetic nature greatly moved.

And Pierre turned back, sauntering slowly, his cane under his arm, and his hands behind his back. When he had reached the town he again asked himself what he should do, annoyed at having his walk cut short, at having been turned from the direction of the sea by the presence of his brother.

Suddenly an idea came to him.

"I'll go drink a glass of liqueur at Père Marowsko's," and he turned back toward the Ingouville quarter.

He had known Père Marowsko in the hospitals at Paris. He was an old Pole—some said a political refugee, who had had tragic experiences in Poland, and who had come to France to carry on his business of a druggist after passing some fresh examinations. Nothing was known of his past career, although various legends had found currency among the internes and externes at the hospitals, and later among his neighbors. His reputation as a formidable conspirator, a Nihilist, a regicide, a patriot ready for any enterprise, had

proved attractive to the vivid imagination of Pierre Roland, and he had become the friend of the old Pole, without, however, having obtained from him any details regarding his life. It was owing to the young physician that the old man had come to Havre to establish himself in business, relying upon the patronage that the former had promised to bring him.

In the meantime he lived economically in his little shop, selling medicines to the small dealers and working people of the neighborhood.

Pierre often dropped in to see him after dinner and have an hour's chat, for he had taken a fancy to Marowsko's calm face and occasional lapses into conversation, believing that his long silences were an indication of much profound reflection.

A single gas jet burned over a counter filled with phials. Those in the window had not yet been lighted, from motives of economy. Behind the counter, seated on one chair with his feet resting on another, a bald-headed old man, with a large beaklike nose that, continuing the line of his forehead, gave him the solemn look of a parrot, was fast asleep with his chin resting on his breast.

At the sound of the bell he awoke, rose, and on recognizing the doctor, came forward to greet him with outstretched hands.

His black coat, spotted with stains of acids and sirups, and much too large for his small, lean frame, somewhat resembled an ancient cassock. Marowsko spoke with a strong Polish accent, that gave his weak voice a lisping, childish character, and intonations like those of a child just beginning to talk.

Pierre sat down.

"What's the news, my dear doctor?" asked the Pole.

"Nothing; the same old story!"

"You don't seem lively this evening."

"No, I'm not often so."

"Come, come! You must rouse yourself. What do you say to a glass of liqueur?"

"Thanks; I should be glad to have one."

"Well, then, I will astonish you with a new preparation. For two months I've been trying to make something out of currants, from which thus far we have made nothing but sirup. I—well, I've found it—I've found it—a good liqueur, very good!"

And beaming all over he went to a closet, which he opened, and took out a phial. He moved about in an undecided way, with short, incomplete gestures—never fully extending his arms or his legs, or making an entire motion. His ideas were of the same order as his movements. He suggested, indicated, sketched them, but never went the length of stating them.

His principal business in life seemed to be the preparation of liqueurs and sirups. "With a good sirup or a good liqueur, one can make a fortune," was a frequent remark of his; and he had invented hundreds of sweet concoctions, without being able to place a single one of them on the market. Pierre declared that Marowsko made him think of Marat.

Two small glasses were brought from the back room and placed on the preparation counter. Then the two men examined the color of the new liquid by holding it up to the light.

"Beautiful ruby!" was Pierre's verdict.

"Isn't it?"

And the old parrot-like face was wreathed in smiles.

The doctor tasted the precious cordial, held it in his mouth, pondered, tasted again, again reflected, and at last spoke:

"Good, very good, and with a decidedly original flavor. A genuine find, my dear sir."

"Yes, I am quite satisfied."

Then the old man consulted his visitor as to how the new liqueur should be named. He thought of calling it "Essence de Groseille," or, rather, "Fine Groseille," or "Grosélia," or "Groséline."

Pierre was not satisfied with either of these. Marowsko then had an idea.

"What you said just now is good, very good—'Beautiful ruby.'"

The doctor argued against the appropriateness of the title, although it was his own invention, and advised strongly in favor of "Groseillette," which Marowsko thought admirable.

Then he lapsed into silence, and remained for several minutes seated under the single gas jet without saying a word.

"Something strange happened to u this evening," said Pierre at last, al most in spite of himself. "One of my father's friends has died, and left his fortune to my brother."

The druggist did not at first seem to understand, but after reflection, hoped that the doctor would get half. When the affair had been fully explained, he seemed surprised and vexed, and as an expression of his dissatisfaction at seeing his young friend sacrificed, he kept repeating:

"That will not look well."

Pierre, whose lassitude was again getting the upper hand of him, wanted to know what the old man meant. What evil could result from his brother's having inherited a fortune from a friend of the family? But the worthy man, circumspect in his day and generation, would not explain.

"In such a case, it is customary to divide the fortune equally between the two brothers. I tell you it will not look well."

And the doctor, out of patience, went away, returned to the paternal roof, and retired for the night.

For some time he could hear Jean softly walking up and down the adjoining room; then he fell asleep.

CHAPTER III

THE DEMON OF JEALOUSY

The doctor awoke next day with a settled determination to make his fortune.

He had already come to this decision several times before, but without acting upon it. At the outset of all his attempts to enter upon a new career, the hope of becoming suddenly wealthy had

buoyed him up and given him courage until he encountered the first obstacle, the first repulse, which would at once turn him in some new direction.

Cozily ensconced in his warm bed he meditated. How many physicians had become millionaires in less than no time! All that was needed was a little skill and ability, for, in the course of his studies, he had gauged the most celebrated professors of the healing art and set them down as jackasses. Surely he was as clever as they, if not more so! If he could manage in some way to capture the patronage of the wealthy and fashionable in Havre, he would be able to make 100,000 frs. a year easily. And he ran over items of this imposing income. In the morning he would call on his patients. Taking the very lowest average, he would make ten visits a day, which, at 20 frs. each, would give him 72,000 frs. a year, or more probably 75,000 frs. since he would be certain to be called to see more than ten patients. In the afternoon he would devote himself to office practice; and, if he only received ten visits at ten francs, he would have 36,000 frs. at the end of the year. Thus he would have an income of 120,000 frs., in round numbers. Former patrons and friends whom he would call on for ten francs a visit, and for whom he would prescribe at his office for five francs, might slightly diminish this total; but this again would be made up by consultations with other physicians and the numerous petty perquisites of the profession.

Nothing easier than to reach this point by dint of skillful if indirect advertising—the insertion of paragraphs in the *Figaro* calling attention to the fact that the whole body of Paris savants had their eyes fixed on him, and were deeply interested in the surprising cures performed by the young and modest physician of Havre. He would be richer than his brother—richer and celebrated—and satisfied with himself, for he would be the architect of his own fortune, and he would be generous to his aged parents, who would be justly proud of his renown. He would not marry, not caring to embarrass himself with one exacting woman; but he would have intimate friends among the prettiest of his women patrons.

By this time he felt so sure of success that he sprang out of bed as if intent on at once grasping it, and dressed himself in order to look through the town for a suite of rooms that would suit him.

Then, rambling about the streets, he thought how insignificant are the trifles that sometimes affect our most important actions. For three weeks he had been hesitating about taking some decided step, when this course suddenly occurred to him—doubtless as a consequence of his brother's having received a legacy.

He stopped before doors beside which were cards advertising "beautiful" or "luxurious" apartments or "apartments" pure and simple, the latter only inspiring his contempt. Then he inspected several with a haughty air, measured the height of ceilings, sketched on his memorandum book the plan of the apartment, showing the communicating doors and those opening into the hall, informing them that he was a physician and received many visits. The staircase must be large and well kept; he could

not go higher up than one flight.

After taking seven or eight addresses and scribbling down a mass of information, he returned to breakfast a quarter of an hour late.

In the vestibule he heard the rattling of dishes. Could they have begun without him?. Why? Meals were never very punctual in that household. He felt hurt and dissatisfied, as he was a little sensitive. As soon as he entered the room his father said to him:

"Come, Pierre, make haste! You know we are going to the lawyer's at two. This is no day for loitering."

The doctor sat down without replying, after having kissed his mother and pressed the hands of his father and brother. He then took from the dish in the centre of the table the cutlet that had been left for him. It was cold and dry. It was also probably the poorest. He thought that it might have been left in the oven until his arrival, and that they should not have so completely forgotten their other son—the eldest. The conversation that had been interrupted by his entrance was continued.

"As for me," said Madame Roland to Jean, "this is what I should do, and at once. I should take showy apartments—something striking; I would go into society, buy a horse, and select one or two interesting cases to plead, thus securing a foothold in the higher court. I would seek to be a kind of very special amateur advocate. Thank Heaven! you are beyond the reach of want, and if you follow a profession, it will be in order not to lose the fruits of your studies, and because no man should remain idle."

Père Roland, who was peeling a pear, said:

"*Cristi!* In your place I should buy a fine craft—a cutter, built on the model of our pilot boats—and should sail as far as Senegal."

Pierre, in his turn, gave an opinion. It was to the effect that a man's intellectual or moral worth did not depend on his fortune. To those of only moderate intelligence money was too often the cause of their degradation, while in the hands of the strong it was a powerful lever. The latter, however, were rare. If Jean was really a man above the average, he would now be able to give proof of it, since he found himself beyond the reach of want. But he would have to work a hundred times harder than he would have been called upon to do under ordinary circumstances. It was not a question of pleading for, or against, the widow and orphan, and of pocketing a certain number of crowns for a case won, or lost; but of becoming an eminent jurist —a great legal light!

And he added in conclusion:

"If I had money, I should dissect bodies!"

Père Roland shrugged his shoulders:

"Tra, la, la! The wisest thing to do is to take life easy. We are not beasts of burden, but men. When one is born to poverty, one must work—and, so much the worse, one works; but when one has an income, one would be a fool to kill himself with work."

"Our inclinations are not the same," replied Pierre with dignity. "As for me, all that I respect in the world is knowledge and intellect—everything else is contemptible."

As Madame Roland always endeavored to avert the collisions that were constantly occurring between

father and son, on the present occasion she turned the drift of the conversation by referring to a murder that had been committed the week previous at Bolbec-Nointot. The attention of the family was soon occupied by the details of the tragedy, their atrocity, and the attractive mystery inseparable from even vulgar, scandalous and loathsome crimes—a mystery that exercises a strange and fascinating power over the imagination.

Père Roland, however, frequently consulted his watch.

"Come," he said, "it is time to be going."

"It is not one yet," was Pierre's sarcastic comment. "As there is abundance of time, it was scarcely worth while to give me a cold cutlet to eat."

"Are you coming to the lawyer's with us?" asked his mother.

"What should I do there? My presence is entirely unnecessary."

Jean remained as silent as if he were in no way interested in the matter. When the Bolbec murder was being discussed, he had laid down certain legal principles, and made certain points regarding crimes and criminals. Now he had relapsed into silence; but the brilliancy of his eyes, his red cheeks, and even his glossy beard seemed to proclaim his happiness.

After the family had set out, Pierre, finding himself again alone, continued his morning's search for furnished apartments. After two or three hours of ascending and descending stairs, he finally discovered, on the Boulevard François I, something really desirable—a large mezzanine apartment with doors opening on two different streets, two reception rooms, a corridor inclosed in glass where patients, while waiting, might stroll about among the flowers, and a charming circular dining-room with windows looking out on the sea.

Just as he was about to take it, the rent—three thousand francs—proved a stumbling block, as the first quarter must be paid in advance, and he had not even a sou of his own.

The small fortune that his father had been able to put aside did not yield quite eight thousand francs a year, and Pierre had often reproached himself for having caused his parents difficulties through his indecision in the choice of a profession, his invariably abandoned experiments, and his continual taking up of new studies. He therefore let the matter stand, promising a decision in two days. Meanwhile it occurred to him that he might ask his brother to advance money for the first three or even six months—fifteen hundred francs—as soon as the latter should come into possession of his legacy.

"That would only be a few months' loan at the longest," he thought. "I should probably repay it even before the end of the year. Nothing would be more natural, and he would be glad to be able to accommodate me."

As it was not yet four o'clock, and he had nothing, absolutely nothing to do, he sauntered into the Public Gardens and sat down. There he remained on his bench, not even giving himself the trouble to think, his eyes fixed on the ground, a prey to a sense of lassitude that was fast developing into real discomfort.

Still, he had passed all the preceding days in this way since his return to the paternal roof, without suffering as he was now doing from the void in his

life and from inaction. How had he been able to pass the hours from the time he rose until bedtime?

He had lounged on the pier when the tide came in, lounged on the streets, lounged in the cafés, lounged at Marowsko's, lounged everywhere. And now this kind of life, that had seemed tolerable enough up to the present time, had become hateful to him. If he had had money he would have taken a carriage and gone for a long drive in the country along roads shaded by beeches and oaks; but he was forced to count the price of a glass of beer or a postage stamp, and such extravagance was not within his means. It suddenly occurred to him how hard it was, when a man is past thirty, to be obliged from time to time to blushingly ask his mother for a louis, and he muttered to himself as he scratched the gravel with his cane:

"*Cristi!* if I only had money."

And the thought of his brother's legacy again came to him like the sting of a wasp; but he dismissed it impatiently, not wishing to surrender himself to envy.

Fair, light-haired children were playing around him in the dust of the paths, and carefully constructing imposing mountains of sand, only to tumble them down with a kick as soon as built.

This was for Pierre one of those depressing days when one looks into all the corners of one's mind and shakes out all its creases.

"Our own tasks," he reflected, "resemble the work of these youngsters." Then he asked himself whether it were not the wisest course in life to beget two or three of these little, useless beings, and watch them grow up with a pleased curiosity. And the desire to marry came to him. One would at least hear some one moving about in the hours of trouble and uncertainty; it is something to have woman's sympathy when one is suffering.

He began to think about women. He knew them but slightly, his flirtations in the Latin Quarter having seldom lasted more than a fortnight, being exhausted, and continued or replaced by a new one when the next remittance arrived. There must, however, be kind creatures. Was not his mother the good sense and the attraction of his father's fireside? How he would like to meet a woman—a real woman!

He rose suddenly with a resolution to call on Madame Rosémilly. Then he sat down again as suddenly. She was displeasing to him. Why? She was too vulgarly practical; besides, did she not appear to prefer Jean? Without admitting it in so many words, this preference counted for much in his low estimate of the widow's intelligence; for, although he loved his brother, he could not help considering him rather commonplace intellectually, and as inferior to himself.

He did not intend, however, to remain where he was until nightfall, and, as on the previous evening, he anxiously asked himself, "What shall I do?"

He now felt within him the necessity of being petted, embraced and consoled. But consoled for what? He could not have told; but he was passing through one of those periods of weakness and lassitude in which the presence of a woman, the caresses of a woman, the touch of a hand, a glance from eyes blue or black, seem suddenly indispensable to our hearts.

And the recollection came to him of

a waitress in a wine shop whom he had one evening taken home, and whom he had seen again from time to time.

He again rose to go and drink a "bock" with this girl. What should he say to her? What would she say to him? Nothing, no doubt; but what did it matter? He would hold her hand a moment. She seemed to have taken a fancy to him. Why, then, did he not see her oftener?

He found her taking a nap on a chair in the almost deserted wine shop. Three customers were smoking their pipes, with their elbows on the oak tables; the cashier was reading a novel; while the proprietor, in his shirt sleeves, was asleep on the bench.

As soon as she saw him the girl rose quickly and came forward, saying:

"Good-day; how are you?"

"All right; and you?"

"Oh! very well. What a stranger you are!"

"Yes, I have but little time to myself; you know I'm a physician."

"Well, why didn't you tell me so before? If I had only known it, I would have consulted you when I was ailing last week. What will you take?"

"A beer; and you?"

"I'll have one, too, as you pay for it."

She brought the glasses, and, seated opposite each other, they chatted. Every now and then she would take his hand with the easy familiarity of her class, and looking at him with tender glances, she said:

"Why don't you come oftener? I like you ever so much, you know."

But he had already had enough of her, and she appeared in his eyes what she really was—stupid, common and vulgar.

"Women," he said to himself, "should come to us only in dreams, or surrounded by the aureole of luxury, that idealizes what is commonplace."

"You passed here the other morning with a handsome light-haired gentleman with a long beard," she remarked; "was it your brother?"

"Yes, it was my brother."

"He is awfully good-looking."

"You think so?"

"Certainly; and he looks as if he lived well."

What uncontrollable impulse suddenly urged Pierre to tell this wine-shop waitress of Jean's legacy? Why did the story, that he would have forced back had he been alone, come to his lips at that instant, and why did he allow it to make its way out from between his lips as if he felt compelled to relieve his heart, swollen with bitterness, before some one?

"He's a lucky fellow, my brother," he said as he crossed his legs; "he's just fallen heir to an income of twenty thousand francs."

She opened wide her blue, covetous eyes.

"And who left it to him? His grandmother, or his aunt?"

"No, an old friend of my parents."

"Only a friend? Impossible. And you didn't get anything?"

"No; I scarcely knew him."

She thought a moment, and then, with a peculiar smile, said:

"Well, your brother is fortunate in having friends like that. No wonder he doesn't look at all like you."

His first impulse was to slap her face, without exactly knowing why; but he only asked, in a constrained way:

"What do you mean?"

"Me?—oh, nothing," she replied, with affected ingenuousness; "only he's luckier than you."

He threw twenty sous on the table, and went out.

Then he kept repeating the phrase: "No wonder he doesn't look at all like you." What was she thinking of? What hidden meaning lay concealed in these words? They were certainly inspired by malice and spitefulness. They were insulting. Yes, the girl must have thought that Jean was Maréchal's son.

The emotion that this slur on his mother's good name aroused in him was so violent that he stopped and looked about for some place to sit down.

He saw another café opposite, went in, took a chair, and ordered another "bock."

He felt his heart beat; cold chills ran over him. Suddenly he remembered what Marowsko had said the day before: "It will not look well." Had the same thought—the same suspicion—occurred to him and to this waitress?

Leaning over his beer glass, he watched the white foam rise and melt, while he asked himself:

"Can people really believe a thing like that?"

The reasons that gave rise to this odious hypothesis in the minds of others now appeared to him, in their order, clear, evident, exasperating. That an old bachelor without heirs should leave his fortune to the two children of a friend—nothing seemed simpler or more natural; but when he gave the whole of it to one only, no doubt the world would at first be surprised, then gossip, and finally smile. Why had he not foreseen it? Why had his father not had an inkling of it? Why had his mother not suspected it? No, they were too happy over this unexpected windfall; such a thought would not occur to them. Besides, how could these worthy people entertain such an ignoble suspicion?

But the public, the neighbors, the tradesmen, all who knew them—would they not repeat this odious slander, laugh and jest over it, ridiculing his father, and despising his mother?

And the remark made by the wine-shop girl, that Jean was light and he dark, that they did not resemble each other either in face, gait, figure, or mind, would likewise occur to every one. When they referred in future to Roland's son, people would ask: "Which, the real or the false one?"

He got up, having decided that his brother must be warned—put on his guard against the terrible danger that threatened their mother's honor. But what would Jean do? The simplest way out of the difficulty would be to refuse the legacy, which would then go to the poor, and to say to friends and acquaintances who had heard of the will that the latter contained objectionable clauses and conditions, that would have made Jean not an heir, but a trustee.

As he entered the house he decided that he ought to see his brother alone, so as not to have to speak on such a subject before his parents.

As he opened the door he heard the sound of voices and laughter in the salon, and on entering that apartment he discovered that his father had brought back with them Madame Rosémilly and Captain Beausire to dinner in honor of the joyful occasion.

Vermouth and absinthe were handed round to excite an appetite, and the

party were already in the best of spirits. Captain Beausire was a little roly-poly man, whose angles had been rounded off by much rolling about on the sea, and whose ideas were as smooth as his person—like pebbles on the beach—who laughed heartily and seemed to consider that there was good in everything in life.

He clinked glasses with Père Roland, while Jean filled those of the ladies a second time.

Madame Rosémilly refused, when Captain Beausire, who had known her husband, exclaimed:

"Come, come, madame, *bis repetita placent,* as we say in *patois,* which signifies: 'Two Vermouths can't do one any harm.' Now as for me, since I no longer follow the sea, I give myself, every day before dinner, two or three of those artificial 'rolls.' I supplement them with a little 'pitching' after the coffee, which makes the sea rise during the rest of the evening. However, I never go the length of raising a 'tempest,' never, never, never, for I fear 'shipwreck.' "

Roland, whose passion for the sea was encouraged by the old sailor, laughed heartily, his face already glowing, and his eye unsteady from the absinthe. He had a paunch—a capacious abdomen in which all the rest of his body appeared to have been absorbed—one of those soft, yielding corporations with which men who sit a great deal are afflicted, and who seem to have neither thighs, chest, arms, nor neck—all being apparently heaped up together on the seat of their chair.

Beausire, on the contrary, although short and stout, was as well filled out as an egg and as hard as a ball.

Madame Roland had not yet finished her first glass; and, rosy with happiness, her eyes shining, she was lost in the contemplation of her son Jean.

His cup of enjoyment seemed at length to be full. The affair was concluded, the papers had been signed, and now he had an income of twenty thousand francs. By the way in which he laughed, from his speaking with fuller, more sonorous tones than was his wont, from his more decided manner and his greater degree of assurance, it was evident that he already had acquired the self-poise that money brings.

Dinner was announced, and as old Roland was about to offer his arm to Madame Rosémilly, his wife interposed:

"No, no, father, to-day everything is for Jean."

The table groaned under unaccustomed plenty. Jean took his father's seat, and before his plate stood a huge bouquet with silk favors—such as only grace very ceremonious occasions—which rose like a flag-decorated dome. At its sides were four glass dishes, one containing a pyramid of superb peaches; the second, an immense cake filled with whipped cream, and covered with bells made of frosting—a regular cathedral; the third, slices of pineapples in a white sirup; and the fourth—unheard-of extravagance—black grapes brought from the tropics.

"Bigre!" said Pierre, seating himself. "We seem to be celebrating the occasion of Jean le Riche!"

After the soup they drank Madeira, and everybody began to talk at once. Beausire told of a dinner that he had eaten in Santo Domingo, at the table of a negro general. Père Roland listened to him, but endeavored to get in

edgeways a story of his own about a certain repast given by one of his friends at Meudon, as a consequence of having partaken of which every guest had to pay the penalty of a fortnight's illness. Madame Rosémilly, Jean, and his mother talked over a proposed excursion to Saint Jouin, and a breakfast there, from which they promised themselves much unalloyed pleasure; while Pierre bitterly regretted not having dined alone, at a cheap seaside restaurant, where he would have escaped all the noise, laughter and joyful manifestations that were unnerving him.

He reflected as to how he should manage to communicate his fears to his brother, and to induce him to give up the fortune that he had already accepted, that he was even now enjoying, and that was exercising its intoxicating influence upon him. It would no doubt be hard for him, but the necessity was there; he could not hesitate since their mother's good name was at stake.

The appearance of an enormous trout started Roland off into a series of tales about fishing. Beausire matched them with wonderful adventures at Gaboon, at Sainte Marie, in Madagascar, and, particularly, on the coasts of China and Japan, where, he declared, the fish had faces as comical as those of the inhabitants. And he described them, their great, golden eyes, their blue or red bellies, their queer fins, like fans, their crescent-shaped tails—so vividly and with so much humor that his hearers laughed until tears stood in their eyes.

Pierre alone seemed incredulous, and muttered to himself:

"No wonder that the Normans are called the Gascons of the North!"

After the fish came a "vol-au-vent," then a roast chicken, a salad, kidney beans, and a pâté of Pithiviers larks. Madame de Rosémilly's maid assisted in waiting on the table, and the general good humor sensibly increased with each successive glass of wine. When the cork of the first bottle of champagne popped, Père Roland, greatly excited, and imitating the sound with his lips, exclaimed:

"I like that better than the sound of a pistol."

Pierre, more and more annoyed, replied with a sneer:

"Still, it may be more dangerous for you."

Roland, who was about to drink, replaced his full glass on the table, and asked:

"How so?"

For some time past he had been complaining of his health—or torpor, giddiness and certain constant and inexplicable unpleasant sensations. The doctor replied:

"Because the pistol ball might miss you; but the wine goes straight into your stomach."

"And then?"

"And then it burns in the stomach, disorganizes the nervous system, renders the circulation sluggish, and paves the way for apoplexy, with which all men of your temperament are threatened."

The fumes of increasing intoxication that had gradually been overpowering the ex-jeweler were suddenly dispersed as by a gust of wind, and he looked at his son with anxious, restless eyes, endeavoring to make out whether he was not jesting.

"Oh, these plaguy doctors!" exclaimed Beausire; "they're all just alike.

You mustn't eat, you mustn't drink, or make love, or dance round dances! It is all detrimental to your precious health. Well, I've done everything they forbid in all parts of the world, wherever I could, and as often as I could, and I don't see that I'm any the worse for it."

"In the first place, captain," replied Pierre, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice, "you're stronger than my father; and, besides, all good livers talk just as you do until the day when—and they never return to say to the prudent medical adviser: 'You were right, doctor.' When I see my father do precisely what he ought not to do, what is most dangerous for him to do, it is only natural that I should warn him. A pretty son I should be if I did not."

"Come, Pierre," interrupted Madame Roland, greatly annoyed, "what is the matter with you? It can't do him any harm for once. Think what an occasion it is for him—for us all! You will spoil his pleasure and ours, too. You are very ill-natured."

"Let him do as he likes," Pierre muttered to himself, shrugging his shoulders; "I have warned him."

But Père Roland did not drink. He looked at his glass full of clear, sparkling wine, whose intoxicating essence was coming to the surface in minute bubbles that were pressing eagerly, rapidly upward, and bursting as they reached the air. He looked at it with the distrust of the fox that has found a dead fowl, but suspects a trap.

"You think that would do me much harm?" he asked hesitatingly.

Pierre was touched with a feeling of compunction, and upbraided himself for having caused others to suffer through his ill humor.

"No, go ahead," he said, "you may drink this time; but don't abuse the privilege, and don't make a practice of it."

Then Père Roland raised his glass, but without having quite decided whether he would drink or not. He again looked at it in a woe-begone fashion, at once desirous and fearful; then he smelt it, tasted it, sipped it, keeping the wine in his mouth, but all the time the prey of many an anxious thought, distracted by weakness and the desire to gratify his palate, and filled with regret as soon as he had drained the last drop.

All at one Pierre met the eye of Madame Rosémilly. It was fixed on him—clear, blue, penetrating and stern. He at once divined the meaning of the look—the irritation that had possessed the simple-minded, straightforward little woman, for her glance said to him:

"You are envious; that is disgraceful."

He bent down his head, and went on eating. But he was not hungry, and nothing pleased him. He was tormented by a desire to go away from these people, so that he would no longer hear them talking, jesting and laughing.

Meantime Père Roland, the fumes of the wine having again gone to his head, had already forgotten his son's advice, and was looking askance at a bottle of champagne, still nearly full, that had been left by the side of his plate. He dared not touch it, for fear of receiving another admonition, and he was therefore meditating by what means he could gain possession of it without attracting Pierre's attention. Finally he decided in favor of the most natural course pos-

sible. He took the bottle carelessly, and, holding it at the bottom, reached across the table, and first filled the doctor's glass, which happened to be empty; then he filled up the other glasses round the table, and when he came back to his own, he began talking very loud, so that if any one noticed him filling his glass they would have declared that it had been done inadvertently. However, no one seemed to notice him.

Pierre, without thinking of what he was doing, drank a good deal. Nervous and annoyed, he frequently, but unconsciously, raised his glass with its clear, effervescing liquid to his lips.

Gradually a pleasant warmth spread over his body and diffused itself throughout his entire being, like a tepid, gracious wave bringing with it joy and comfort. He already felt better, less impatient, less discontented; even his resolution to speak to his brother that very evening was weakened—not that he had gone so far as to think of abandoning his intention, but he was not anxious to disturb his newly-found serenity.

At last Beausire rose to propose a toast. Having bowed all around, he said:

"Very gracious ladies and gentlemen: We have met to celebrate a happy event in the life of one of our friends. It was formerly said that Fortune was blind. I believe that she was only short-sighted, or malicious, and that she has just purchased an excellent pair of marine glasses, which have enabled her to make out in the port of Havre the son of our gallant comrade Roland, captain of the *Pearl*."

"Bravos" were uttered by all lips, reënforced by much clapping of hands, and Père Roland was happy.

After coughing, for he felt husky, and his tongue was somewhat unwieldy, he stammered out these words:

"Thank you, captain; thanks for myself and for my son. I shall never forget your conduct on the present occasion. May you always be happy."

His eyes being filled with tears that ran down his nose, he sat down, not thinking of anything more to say.

Jean, who was laughing, took the floor:

"It is I who should thank the devoted, the dear" (here he looked at Madame Rosémilly) "friends who have to-day given me this touching proof of their affection. But it is not by words that I can testify my gratitude. I shall prove it to-morrow, every instant of my life—always; for our friendship is not of the kind that passes away."

"Well said, my child!" murmured his mother, much affected; but Beausire exclaimed:

"Come, Madame Rosémilly, say something in behalf of the ladies."

She raised her glass, and in a gentle voice, a little tinged with sadness, she said:

"I drink to the blessed memory of Monsieur Maréchal."

There was a pause for a few seconds —a calm, as for contemplation after a prayer. Then Beausire, who was handy at compliments, remarked:

"It takes the women to think of those little refinements of sentiment."

Then, turning to Père Roland, he said:

"But, after all, who was this Maréchal? You were very intimate with him, were you not?"

The old man, somewhat maudlin in his cups, began to shed tears, and in disjointed sentences explained:

"A brother—you know—one of those we never meet any more—we were never separated—he dined with us every evening—and he paid for our seats at the theatre—I can't say any more than that—than that—than that. A friend—a true—true—wasn't he, Louise?"

"Yes, a faithful friend," replied his wife simply.

Pierre looked at his father and mother, but, as the conversation turned on other subjects, he began to drink again.

He had little recollection of what occurred after that, except that they drank coffee and liqueur and laughed and joked. He retired toward midnight, his mind confused and his head heavy, and slept like a log until nine the next morning.

CHAPTER IV

A SUDDEN QUESTION

SLUMBER, steeped in champagne and chartreuse, no doubt soothed and calmed him, for he awoke in a very kindly disposition of mind. As he dressed himself, he examined, weighed and summed up the emotions of the preceding evening, and sought to disentangle from them, clearly and completely, the real secret motives, the personal as well as the external motives.

It was, in fact, quite possible that the girl in the wine shop had conceived a vile idea, on learning that only one of the sons of Roland had received a legacy from an unknown person. Have not such creatures always such suspicions, without the shadow of a motive, about every honest woman? Do they not, whenever they talk, insult, calumniate, defame, every woman whom they imagine to be beyond reproach? Whenever an unimpeachable character is mentioned in their presence, they become annoyed as if they were being slandered, and cry, "Ah, yes, indeed, I know your married women—models of propriety. They have more intrigues than we, only they conceal them because they are hypocrites. Oh, yes; models of propriety!"

Under any other circumstances, he certainly would not have listened to, nor even supposed possible, such insinuations against his poor mother, so good, so simple, so worthy. But his soul was troubled by the leaven of jealousy fermenting in him. And in his over-excited state, on the watch, in spite of himself, for anything which might be of detriment to his brother, he had perhaps attributed to this waitress odious meanings of which she was innocent. It was possible that his imagination alone, the imagination which he did not control, and which incessantly outstripped his will, was straying and roaming untrammeled in the infinite universe of ideas, and bringing thence shameful, unavowable thoughts, which he hid away in the depths of his soul, as in some unsounded abyss, like something stolen. It might be that his imagination alone created and invented this hor-

rible doubt. His heart assuredly, his own heart, had its own secrets; and this wonderful heart perhaps had found in this abominable doubt a means of depriving his brother of the inheritance that he envied. He suspected himself, at present; and, as devotees interrogate their conscience, he questioned all the mysteries of his thoughts.

Certainly Madame Rosémilly, limited as was her intelligence, had the tact, the keen scent, the subtle perception of women. But this idea had never occurred to her, for she drank, in perfect good faith, to the blessed memory of Monsieur Maréchal. She would not have done so if the slightest suspicion had touched her. Now he no longer had any doubts; his involuntary displeasure at the fortune that had fallen to his brother, and also, assuredly, his religious love for his mother, had intensified his scruples—pious and honorable scruples indeed, but exaggerated.

On arriving at this conclusion, he had a feeling of satisfaction as at the accomplishment of a good action, and he resolved to be amiable to all the world, beginning with his father, whose whims, stupid assertions, vulgar notions, and too apparent mediocrity incessantly irritated him.

He did not come in late to breakfast, and he amused all the family with his wit and good humor.

His mother, delighted, said to him:

"Dear Pierre, you do not know how witty and amusing you can be when you please."

And he talked on, making epigrams, and exciting their mirth by ingenious caricatures of their friends. Beausire was his butt, and at times Madame Rosémilly; but he treated her in a discreet fashion, not too ill-naturedly. And he thought as he looked at his brother: "Why don't you stand up for her, stupid? It is all very well, your being rich, but I can cut you out whenever I choose."

Over the coffee he said to his father:

"Are you going to use the *Pearl* today?"

"No, my boy."

"Can I take her and Jean Bart?"

"Oh, yes; whenever you like."

He bought a good cigar at the first tobacconist's he came to, and, with a joyous air, went down to the harbor.

He looked at the clear, luminous sky of delicate blue, freshened by the sea breeze.

Papagris, the sailor, called commonly Jean Bart, was asleep at the bottom of the boat, which it was his duty to have ready for sailing every day at noon, when there was no fishing party in the morning.

"Only ourselves, skipper," cried Pierre, as he descended the iron ladder from the quay and leaped into the boat.

"How is the wind?" he asked.

"Still from the north, Master Pierre. We'll have a good breeze in the offing."

He hoisted the foresail, and raised the anchor, and the boat, unmoored, began to glide gently toward the pier on the calm water of the harbor. The slight land breeze struck the top of the sail so gently as to be imperceptible, and the *Pearl* seemed endowed with a life of its own—the life of vessels—urged on by a mysterious and hidden force in itself. Pierre took the tiller, and, cigar in mouth, his legs stretched out on the seat, his eyes half closed in the blinding rays of the sun, watched,

as they passed them, the huge tarred timbers of the breakwater.

When they reached the open sea, at the extreme end of the north pier, the freshening breeze, as it passed across the doctor's face and hands, seemed like a chilly kiss. He drew a long breath and inflated his lungs, as if drinking it in. It filled the brown sail that bellied out, gave the *Pearl* a list to leeward, and enlivened her speed.

Jean Bart quickly hoisted the jib, and its triangle, filled with the wind, looked like a wing. Then, taking two strides aft, he threw loose the driver which was lashed to its mast.

The boat abruptly keeled over, and, as she flew on at full speed, there was a gentle swishing, bubbling sound as she cut through the water.

The stem cut the sea like a share of a plough run wild, and the waves it raised, in white curves of foam, curled up, and fell back just as the heavy brown earth falls back from the furrow.

Every wave they encountered—and they were short and close together—gave the *Pearl* a shock from the jib-boom to the rudder, which quivered in Pierre's hands; and when the wind blew stronger for some seconds the water skimmed the gunwale as if it would overflow the boat. A steam collier from Liverpool was at anchor, waiting for the tide; they passed under her stern, and then visited the ships in the roadstead, one after the other, and then stood a little farther out to admire the coast.

For three hours Pierre, in calm and motionless content, went hither and thither on the rippling water, steering as though it were some winged creature, swift and obedient, this thing of wood and canvas that came and went at his caprice, at a pressure of his hand.

He was plunged in revery—such revery as comes to one on horseback or on a ship's deck. He thought of his future, which was to be prosperous, and of the pleasure of a life of intelligence. To-morrow he would ask his brother to lend him, for three months, fifteen hundred francs, so that he could move at once into the pretty suite of rooms in the Boulevard François I.

The sailor said, all at once:

"Here's the fog, Master Pierre. Better put about."

He raised his eyes, and saw in the north an extensive gray light shadow that obscured the sky, and covered the sea, and was advancing toward them like a cloud fallen from the sky.

He veered round, and, with the wind astern, directed his course to the jetty, followed by the driving fog, which gained on them. As it reached the *Pearl,* and enveloped it in its intangible density, a cold chill ran through Pierre's limbs; and a smoky, musty odor, the strange odor of sea fog, made him close his mouth that he might not swallow this damp and icy mist. When the boat reached its anchorage in the dock, the whole town was already buried in the fine vapor, which, without falling, wetted one like rain, and spread over the houses and streets like a river overflowing.

Pierre, with his hands and feet chilled, hurried home, and flung himself on his bed to sleep till dinner time. When he entered the dining-room, his mother was saying to Jean:

"The corridor will be charming. We will put some flowers there. You'll see. I will take on myself to attend to them

and renew them. When you give a party, it will be a fairy scene."

"What are you talking about?" the doctor asked.

"A delightful suite of rooms I have just rented for your brother—a real treasure on the mezzanine floor overlooking two streets. It contains two reception rooms, a glass corridor, and a little round dining-room, perfectly lovely for a rich bachelor."

Pierre grew pale. His heart was filled with anger.

"Where is it?" he said.

"Boulevard François I."

He doubted no longer, and took his seat, so exasperated that he longed to cry out, "This is too much! Is he to have everything?"

His mother, radiant with pleasure, continued:

"And, fancy, I got it for two thousand eight hundred francs. They asked three thousand, but I obtained a reduction of two hundred francs by taking a lease for three, six, or nine years. Your brother will be admirably settled there. An elegant apartment is all that is necessary to make a lawyer's fortune. It attracts clients, charms and retains them; it inspires them with respect, and lets them understand that a man living in such style must be well paid for his words."

She was silent a few seconds, and resumed:

"We must find something like it for you, but more modest, as you have nothing—still very nice, all the same."

Pierre replied in an indignant tone: "For me! It will be by work and science that I shall succeed!"

His mother persisted:

"Yes, but I assure you a pretty apartment will be a great help, all the same."

About the middle of the meal, he asked abruptly,

"How did you make the acquaintance of this Maréchal?"

Monsieur Roland raised his head, and tried to refresh his memory:

"Wait, I do not remember very well. It is so long ago. Oh, yes, I know! Your mother made his acquaintance in the shop—was not that the way, Louise? He came to order something, and often returned. We knew him as a customer before knowing him as a friend."

Pierre, who was eating French beans, and sticking the point of his fork into them one after the other, as if he were splitting them, rejoined:

"At what time did you make his acquaintance?"

Roland again tried to recollect, but, recalling nothing, appealed to his wife's memory:

"What year was it, Louise? You cannot have forgotten, as you have so good a memory. Let's see. Was it in—in—in '55 or '56? Just think; you must know better than I do."

She reflected for some time; then, with a steady and tranquil voice, replied:

"It was in '58. Pierre was then three years old. I am certain I make no mistake, for it was the year when the child had the scarlatina, and Maréchal, whom we then knew but little, was of great assistance to us."

Roland exclaimed:

"True, true, he was wonderfully kind. When your mother was worn out with fatigue, and I was busy in the shop, he went to the druggist's to bring the medicines. He had, indeed, a noble heart.

And when you were well again, you cannot imagine how happy he was, and how he kissed you. It was from that time that we became great friends."

Then this thought entered Pierre's mind, like a bullet that tears and wounds: "Since he knew me first, was so devoted to me, loved and kissed me so fondly; since I was the cause of the great intimacy with my parents—why did he leave all his fortune to my brother, and nothing to me?"

He asked no more questions, and remained moody rather than thoughtful, nursing a new, as yet undefined disquiet, the secret germ of a new calamity.

He left the house early, and began again to roam the streets. They were buried in the fog, which rendered the night oppressive, opaque and sickening. It might have been called a pestilential vapor bearing down on the earth. It could be seen streaming past the gas lights, which it seemed momentarily to extinguish. The street pavements became slippery, as from an icy coating, and all evil odors seemed to come out of the houses—putrid odors from cellars, from gutters, from spouts, from filthy kitchens—and blend with the odor of the flying mist.

Pierre, with his shoulders to his ears and his hands in his pockets, not wishing to remain longer out in the cold, went to call on Marowsko.

The old druggist was still sleeping under the gas-light of his store. When he recognized Pierre, whom he loved with the attachment of a faithful dog, he shook off his torpor, went to look for his glasses, and brought out his new liqueur.

"Well," asked the doctor, "how are you coming on with your liqueur?"

The Pole explained that four of the principal cafés in the town had consented to give it a trial, and how the *Phare de la Côte* and the *Sémaphore Havrais* would write it up in exchange for some pharmaceutical products presented to the editors.

After a long silence, Marowsko asked if Jean was really in possession of his fortune and put two or three further vague questions on the same subject. His sullen devotion to Pierre revolted against this preference. Pierre believed he could follow his thoughts; he divined, understood, read them in his averted eyes, in the hesitating tone of his voice, in the phrases which rose to his lips, but which he did not utter, and which he would not utter—he so discreet, so timid, so cautious.

He no longer doubted that the old man was thinking: "You ought not to have let him accept this legacy, which will cause evil reports about your mother." Perhaps he even believed that Jean was Maréchal's son. Certainly he believed it. How could he help believing it, as it must appear so probable, so natural, so evident? Had not he himself, Pierre, her son, been struggling for three days with all his force, all the subtle arguments of his heart, to deceive his reason? Was he not still struggling against this terrible suspicion?

And once again the necessity of being alone in order to think, to discuss with himself, to face boldly, without scruples or feebleness, this theory so possible, and yet so monstrous, dominated him so forcibly that he rose without even tasting the liqueur, shook the astonished druggist by the hand, and plunged into the fog of the streets.

He said to himself: "Why did this man Maréchal leave all his fortune to Jean?"

It was now no longer jealousy that made him ask this; it was no longer that rather mean and natural envy which he knew was hid in his bosom, and which he had fought against for the last three days; it was the dread of something horrible—the dread of believing, himself, that Jean, his brother, was the son of that man!

No, he did not believe it, he could not even put to himself so criminal a question. This suspicion, however slight, however improbable, must be rejected by him, utterly and forever. He must have light and certainty, he must have complete assurance in his heart, for his mother was all he loved in the world.

And as he wandered alone in the night, he would submit his memory and his reason to a minute examination, through which the startling truth would be evolved. That done, he would think of it no more, never again. He would go to sleep.

He thought: "Let me see. Let me, first of all, examine the facts; then I will recall all I know of him, his treatment of my brother and me; I will seek for all the motives that could possibly have occasioned this preference. He was there when Jean was born? Yes, but he knew me before that. If he had entertained a mute, secret love for my mother, he would have preferred me; for it was through me, thanks to my scarlatina, that he became the intimate friend of my parents. Logically, therefore, he ought to have chosen me, to have had a more vivid affection for me, unless he felt for my brother, as he saw him growing up, an instinctive attraction and predilection."

Then, with a desperate effort of thought, of all his intellectual power, he retraced his recollections, in order to reconstruct, bring before his mind, recognize, understand this man—the man whom he had constantly seen, without caring for him, during all the years he had passed in Paris.

He felt, however, that walking, the slight motion of his steps, somewhat troubled his ideas, disarranged their order, weakened their reach, and obscured his memory.

In order to throw on the past and its unknown events a keen look from which nothing could escape, he must remain motionless, in some large, empty place. He decided to go and sit on the pier, as he had done the other night.

As he drew near the harbor, he heard, in the direction of the open sea, a melancholy, sinister moan, like the bellowing of a bull, but longer and more powerful. It was a fog horn, the cry of ships lost in the fog.

A shudder shook his flesh and wrung his heart, such an echo was there in his soul and nerves of that cry of distress, which he fancied he had uttered himself. Another similar voice moaned in its turn, but farther away, then close by, the fog horn of the harbor replied to them, rending the night with its clamorous tone.

Pierre walked quickly to the pier without further thought, satisfied to plunge into the lugubrious and moaning darkness.

He sat down at the end of the pier, and closed his eyes to avoid the sight of the electric lights, veiled in mist, which made the port accessible at night,

and of the red light of the lighthouse on the south jetty, which, however, could scarcely be distinguished. Then, turning sideways, he leaned his elbows on the granite, and covered his face with his hands.

His mind, without his speaking the word, kept repeating, as if to summon, evoke and challenge his ghost, "Maréchal—Maréchal." And in the darkness of his closed eyelids he suddenly saw him as he had known him—a man of sixty, with a pointed, white beard, and heavy eyebrows that were likewise white. He was neither tall nor short, had an affable air, soft gray eyes, a modest bearing, the look of an honest, tender and simple soul. He called Pierre and Jean "my dear children"; he never appeared to prefer one to the other, and asked them together to dinner.

Pierre, with the persistence of a hound following a lost trail, began to recall the words, the gestures, the tones, the looks of this man who had disappeared from earth. He recalled him, gradually, just as he was, in his rooms in the Rue Tronchet, when he received his brother and himself at table.

Two maids waited on him, both old, who, for a long time past, doubtless, had acquired the habit of saying "Monsieur Pierre" and "Monsieur Jean."

Maréchal stretched out both hands to the young people, the right to one, the left to the other, as they entered. "Good-day, my children," he would say. "What news have you of your father and mother? As for me, they never write me a line."

The conversation went on pleasantly and familiarly on common topics. There was nothing extraordinary about the man's intellect, but he was gentle, charming and gracious. He was certainly a good friend to them—one of those good friends of which one seldom thinks, because one is so sure of their friendship.

Memories now began to pour in upon Pierre. Maréchal, seeing him sometimes melancholy, and guessing at his poverty as a student, had offered and lent him money, spontaneously—some hundreds of francs, perhaps forgotten by both, and never repaid. The man, then, always loved him, always took an interest in him, since he was troubled about his needs. Then—then—why leave all his fortune to Jean? No; he had never apparently shown more affection for the younger than for the elder brother, been more thoughtful for one than the other, less tender apparently to this one than to that one. Then—then—he must have had a powerful and secret reason for giving all to Jean—all—and nothing to Pierre.

The more he thought of it, the more he revived the past of later years, the more the doctor considered the distinction made between them improbable and incredible.

An acute pang, an inexpressible anguish, entered his breast, and made his heart flutter like a shaken rag. Its springs seemed broken, and the blood, gushing through it, made it tremble violently in streams, tumultuously shaking and tossing it.

Then, half aloud as one speaks in a nightmare, he muttered: "I must know! My God, I must know!"

He went back now still further, to the earliest days when his parents lived in Paris. But faces escaped him, and this muddled his recollections. He was,

above all, anxious to recall Maréchal with blond, chestnut, or black hair. He could not do so; the later appearance of the man, when he was old, had effaced the others. He remembered, however, that he was slender, that he had a soft hand, and often brought flowers, very often, indeed; for his father constantly repeated:

"More bouquets. Why, it is madness, my dear fellow; you will ruin yourself on roses."

Maréchal would reply:

"Let me alone; it gives me great pleasure."

And suddenly the remembrance of his mother's tones, as she smiled and said, "Thanks, my friend," crossed his mind, so distinctly that he fancied he could hear her. She must have pronounced these three words very often, as they were so engraven on the memory of her son!

Maréchal, then, used to bring flowers—he, the rich man, the gentleman, the customer—to this little shopwoman, the wife of a small jeweler. Did he love her? How could he have become the friend of these shopkeepers if he had not loved the wife? He was a man of education and refinement. How many times he talked to Pierre of poetry and poets! His appreciation of writers was not that of an artist, but of a bourgeois who can feel emotion. The doctor had often smiled at his sentimental ideas, which seemed to him rather silly. To-day he understood that this sentimental man could never, never have been the friend of his father, who was so matter-of-fact, so earthy, so heavy, for whom the word poetry had no meaning.

Maréchal, then, young, free, rich, open to all tender emotions, one day, by chance, entered a shop, having probably noticed the pretty woman behind the counter. He bought something, came back, and talked day by day more familiarly, through his frequent purchases, acquiring an entrée to the house, the privilege of smiling at the young wife, and of shaking hands with the husband.

And afterward—afterward—O God! —afterward.

He had loved and caressed the first child, the jeweler's child, till the birth of the second; then down to his death he had remained a stranger; then, his tomb closed, his body decomposed, his name effaced from the names of the living, having disappeared wholly and forever, having no longer to take any precautions, nothing to dread or to hide, he left all his fortune to the second child! Why? The man had intelligence; he must have understood and foreseen that he might, that he would almost infallibly, arouse a suspicion that this child was his. He would thus dishonor a woman! How could he have acted as he did if Jean had not been his son?

And suddenly a precise, terrible recollection crossed Pierre's mind. Maréchal was fair-haired, fair as Jean. He remembered now a little miniature which he had seen in Paris on the parlor chimneypiece, once upon a time, but which had disappeared. Where was it? Lost, or hidden? Oh, if he could only have possession of it for a second! His mother, perhaps, had it in the secret drawer where relics are hidden.

His agony at this thought became so poignant that he groaned aloud—one of those brief moans wrung from the heart by keen anguish. And suddenly, as if it heard him, as if it understood

his condition and replied to him, the fog horn on the pier bellowed close to him. Its voice—the voice of a supernatural monster, more sonorous than thunder, a wild, formidable roar, made to overpower the voice of the winds and waves—spread through the darkness across the invisible sea buried in the fog.

Then, through the mist, near and far, similar cries arose in the night; terrible were these appealing screams from the huge blind steamers.

Again all was still.

Pierre opened his eyes, and stared in surprise at being there, aroused from his nightmare.

"I am mad," he thought; "I suspect my mother." And a flood of love and tenderness, or repentance, prayer and desolation, inundated his heart. His mother! Knowing her as he knew her, how could he suspect her? Was not the soul, the life, of this simple, chaste, loyal woman more transparent than water? Any one who saw and knew her could not but judge her beyond suspicion. And it was he, her son, who doubted her! Oh, if he could have taken her in his arms at that moment, how he would have embraced and caressed her! How he would have knelt to her to ask pardon!

Could she have deceived his father? His father! Certainly he was an honest man, honorable and upright in his dealings, but his soul had never crossed the horizon of his shop. How could this woman, formerly very pretty, as he knew, and as could be still seen, endowed with a delicate, affectionate, tender nature, have accepted as her betrothed, and as her husband, a man so different from herself?

Why ask? She had married him as a girl marries the lad with money whom her parents present to her. They installed themselves at once in their store in the Rue Montmartre; and the young woman presiding at the counter, animated by the spirit of her new home, and by that subtle, sacred sense of community interest which replaces love and even affection in most of the homes of the business people in Paris, had begun to work with all her active and refined intelligence for the fortunes of the house. And her life had passed, in quiet, honorable uniformity without tenderness.

Without tenderness! Could a woman live without love? A young, pretty woman living in Paris, reading books, applauding actresses who die of passion on the stage, could not pass from youth to age without her heart being touched, if only once? He would not believe it of any other woman—why should he believe it of his mother?

Certainly she might have loved as others did! Why should she be different from others, even if she was his mother?

She had been young, with all the poetic weaknesses that trouble the heart of the young. Confined and imprisoned in the shop by the side of a vulgar husband who always talked business, she had dreamed of moonlight, of travels, of kisses interchanged in the evening shadows. And then one day a man had entered, as lovers enter in books, and he had spoken as lovers do.

She had loved him. Why not? She was his mother. Well, was he to be blind and stupid to the extent of rejecting evidence because his mother was involved?

Had she listened to him? Yes, since the man had no other friend; yes, since he had remained faithful to her when she was old and at a distance; yes, since he had left all his fortune to her son, to their son!

Pierre rose, quivering in such wrath that he would have liked to kill some one. His outstretched arms, his open hand longed to smite, to slay, to bruise, to choke! Whom? All the world—father, brother, the dead man, his mother!

He started to return home. What should he do?

As he passed before a little tower near the signal pole, the strident scream of the fog horn sounded right in his ear. His surprise was so great that he almost fell, and recoiled to the stone parapet. There he sat down, with no strength left, so great was the shock.

The steamer which was the first to answer seemed quite near, and appeared at the entrance, the tide being high.

Pierre turned and saw its red eye dimmed by the mist. Then, under the diffused gleam of the electric light, a huge black shadow outlined itself between the two piers. Behind him the voice of the watchman, the hoarse voice of a retired captain, cried:

"Ship ahoy!"

And, in the mist, the voice of the pilot standing on the bridge, with equal hoarseness, replied:

"*Santa Lucia.*"

"Where from?"

"Italy."

"What port?"

"Naples."

Before his troubled eyes, Pierre fancied he could see the crest of flame of Vesuvius, while at the foot of the volcano the fireflies were dancing in the orange groves of Sorrento or Castellamare. How often had he dreamed of those familiar names, as if he had known the districts! If he could but go away, at once, no matter where, and never come back, never write, never let it be known what had become of him! But, no; he must return, return to his paternal home, and sleep in his bed.

So much the worse. He would not return, he would wait till day. The sound of the fog horns pleased him. He rose and began to march like an officer keeping his watch on deck.

Another enormous and mysterious ship followed the first one. It was an English ship returning from India.

He saw many more come in, emerging one after the other out of the impenetrable darkness. When the dampness of the fog became intolerable, Pierre set off toward the town. He was so cold that he entered a sailor's drinking place to get some grog, and when the hot brandy and pepper burned his palate and throat, he felt hope revive in him.

He had deceived himself, perhaps? He knew right well his own vacillating unreason. He had deceived himself beyond doubt. He had accumulated facts as one draws an indictment against an innocent person, whom it is always easy to condemn when one wishes to believe him guilty. After a night's rest, he would think quite differently. Then he went home to bed, and by force of will ended by falling asleep.

CHAPTER V

THE TELLTALE PORTRAIT

But the doctor had not lost himself for more than an hour or two in a troubled sleep before he awoke in the darkness of his warm, closed room. He felt, even before he was able to think, that painful oppression, that unrest of soul, which the sorrow on which we have slept leaves in us. It would seem as if the unhappiness, the shock of which had only struck us the evening before, during repose insinuated itself into our very flesh, and tortured and wearied like a fever. Recollection came to him abruptly, and he sat up in bed.

Then he went over again, slowly, one by one, all the arguments that had agonized his heart on the pier, while the fog horns were screaming. The more he thought, the less he doubted. He felt himself borne along by his logic to the intolerable certainty as by a hand that drags you along and strangles you.

He was thirsty, he was hot, his heart throbbed. He rose to open the window and breathe fresh air, and when he was up a slight noise reached him through the wall.

Jean was sleeping quietly, and snoring gently. He could sleep! He had no forebodings, he had suspected nothing! Their friend, Maréchal, had left him all his fortune. He accepted the money, as it seemed to him right and natural.

He slept, rich and satisfied, not knowing that his brother was worried and suffering. And there arose in Pierre a rage against this care-free and contented sleeper.

The day before he would have knocked at his door and, going in, would have sat beside the bed and said to him, before he was fairly awake, after being startled suddenly:

"Jean, you ought not to keep this legacy, which to-morrow might bring on your mother suspicion and dishonor."

But to-day he could not speak; he could not say to Jean that he did not believe him to be their father's son. At present he must guard in secret, keep buried in his heart, the shame he had discovered; he must hide from all the blot he had detected, and which no one must discover, not even his brother—above all, not his brother.

Little did he think now of empty respect for public opinion. He would have liked all the world to accuse his mother, provided that he—he alone—he knew her to be innocent. How could he bear to live near her every day, and believe, as he saw her, that his brother's father was a stranger?

How calm and serene she was, nevertheless! How sure of herself she seemed! Was it possible for a woman like her, with pure soul and upright heart, to fall without exhibiting later any signs of remorse, or any stings of conscience?

Remorse, remorse! It must formerly, in the early days, have tortured her; then it was blotted out, as everything is blotted out. Certainly she had wept for her fault, and by degrees had almost forgotten it. Have not all women

all, this prodigious faculty of forgetfulness, which makes them scarce recognize, after a few years, the man whose lips have kissed them again and again? The kiss strikes like lightning, love passes like a tempest; then life once more becomes calm as the sky, and begins again as before. Do we remember a passing cloud?

Pierre could not remain in his room. He felt the roof press on his head, and the walls stifled him. And, as he was very thirsty, he lighted his candle to go and drink a glass of water, fresh from the kitchen faucet.

He descended two flights; then, as he ascended with the carafe full, he sat down, in his nightshirt, on one of the steps of the stairs where a current of air was blowing, and drank out of the bottle in long gulps, like a runner out of breath. When he was quiet again, the silence of the dwelling affected him; then, one by one, he distinguished the slightest noises. At first it was the clock in the dining-room, and its ticking seemed to him to grow louder second by second. Then again he heard some one snoring, the short, labored snoring of an old man; his father, no doubt; and he shuddered at the idea, as if it had only just come to him, that these two men, sleeping in the same house, father and son, were nothing to each other! No tie, not even the frailest, united them, and they did not know it! They talked affectionately to each other, they embraced each other, they were glad or sorry together over the same things, as if the same blood ran in their veins. Yet two persons born at the two extremities of the world could not be more alien to each other than this father and this son. They believed they loved each other, because a lie had grown up between them. It was a lie that produced this paternal love and this filial love—a lie impossible to expose, and which no one should ever know but himself, the true son.

Still, still, if he were mistaken? How could he find out? Ah, if there were only a likeness, even a slight one, between his father and Jean, one of those mysterious likenesses that pass from great-grandfather to great-grandson, and show that the whole race descends directly from one source. It would be an easy thing for a medical man like him to recognize it—the form of the jaw, the curve of the nose, the distance between the eyes, the nature of the hair or teeth; even less than these, a gesture, a habit, a trick of manner, a transmitted taste, some sign or other quite characteristic for a trained eye.

He could recall nothing—no, nothing. But he had not looked carefully, he had not observed carefully, as he had had no reason for tracing out these imperceptible indications.

He rose to reënter his room, and began to mount the stairs with slow steps, pondering all the time. As he passed before his brother's door, he stopped short, his hand extended to open it. He was seized with an imperious desire to see Jean at once, to take a long look at him, to surprise him in his sleep, while the peaceful face and the relaxed features were in repose, and when all the artificiality of life had disappeared. In this way he would seize the sleeping secret of his physiognomy, and if any appreciable resemblance existed, it would not escape him.

But if Jean awoke, what should he say? How explain his visit?

He remained standing, his fingers grasping the door handle, and seeking a reason or pretext.

He remembered, all at once, that, eight days before, he had lent his brother a phial of laudanum to allay the pain of a toothache. He might have toothache himself this night and come to get the bottle. Then he entered, but with a furtive step, like a thief.

Jean, with his mouth half open, was sleeping a profound animal sleep. His beard and fair hair made a splash of gold in the white linen. He did not awake, but he stopped snoring.

Pierre bent over him and gazed on him with eager eye. No; this young man did not resemble Roland; and, for the second time, his mind returned to the miniature of Maréchal that had disappeared. He must find it. If he saw it, perhaps he would doubt no longer.

His brother stirred, disturbed doubtless by his presence, or by the light of the candle in his face. Then the doctor retreated on tiptoe toward the door, which he closed noiselessly. He returned to his room, but did not go to bed.

The day was slow in coming. The hours struck, one after another, by the drawing-room clock, which had a deep, serious tone, as though this little specimen of the clockmaker's art had swallowed the bell of a cathedral. The sounds rose up through the empty staircase, traversed walls and doors, and died away in the rooms, in the unhearing ear of the sleepers. Pierre walked to and fro from his bed to the window. What should he do? He was too much upset to pass the day at home. He wished still to be alone, at least till the next day, in order to reflect, to become calm, to fortify himself for the everyday life which he had to resume.

Well, he would go to Trouville, and watch the crowd swarming on the beach! It would divert him, change the current of his thoughts, and give him time to prepare himself for the horrible thing that he had found out.

At earliest dawn he rose and dressed himself. The fog had lifted; it was a beautiful day. As the Trouville boat did not sail till nine o'clock, the doctor thought that he ought to kiss his mother before leaving.

He waited for the hour when she usually rose, and then went down. His heart was throbbing so fast as he touched the door, that he paused to take breath. His hand, as it lay on the door handle, was weak and quivering, almost incapable of the slight exertion of turning the knob to enter. He knocked. His mother's voice asked:

"Who is there?"

"Pierre."

"What do you want?"

"To say good-morning, because I am going to pass the day at Trouville with some friends."

"But I am still in bed."

"Do not disturb yourself, then; I can kiss you on my return, this evening."

He hoped that he could get away without seeing her, without pressing on her cheeks the hypocritical kiss which nauseated him beforehand.

But she replied:

"Wait a moment; I'll open the door. You must wait till I get back into bed."

He heard her bare feet on the floor, and then the sound of the bolt sliding. She cried:

"Come in!"

He went in. She was sitting up in

bed, while beside her Roland, with a silk handkerchief round his head and his face to the wall, continued to sleep. Nothing but a shake of the arm could have awakened him. On the days he went fishing, the maid, who was rung up at the appointed hour by the sailor Papagris, would come and drag her master out of this invincible sleep.

Pierre, as he approached, looked at his mother, and it seemed to him all at once that he had never seen her.

She held up her face; he kissed her on both cheeks, and then seated himself on a low chair.

"You arranged this party yesterday evening?" she said.

"Yes, yesterday evening."

"You will be back for dinner?"

"I do not know yet. In any case, do not wait for me."

He examined her with astonished curiosity. It was his mother, this woman! Her entire countenance, seen from childhood, since his eye could distinguish, her smile, her voice, so well known, so familiar, all at once appeared to him quite new, quite different from what they had been hitherto to him. He understood now that, loving her, he had never looked at her critically. Yet it was she, and he knew every smallest detail of her countenance; but he perceived these little details clearly for the first time. His anxious attention, as he scrutinized this beloved face, revealed to him a difference in it, a physiognomy which he had never before discovered.

He rose to go, and then, suddenly yielding to an unconquerable desire to know what had been gnawing his heart since the evening before, he said:

"I say, mother, I thought I remembered a miniature of Maréchal that we had in our parlor in Paris."

She hesitated a second or two, or at least he imagined that she hesitated; then she said:

"Why, yes!"

"What has become of this portrait?"

Her answer, again, might have come quicker:

"That portrait—wait—I do not quite know—perhaps I have it in my desk."

"I would be very pleased if you would find it for me."

"Yes, I'll look. Why do you want it?"

"Oh, not for myself! I thought it would be quite natural to give it to Jean, and it would please my brother."

"You are right. It is a happy thought. I will look for it as soon as I get up."

He left the room.

It was a cloudless day, without a breath of air. The people in the streets seemed lighthearted; merchants were going to their business, clerks to their office, girls to their shops. Some of them were singing, happy in the brightness of the day.

The passengers were already going on board the Trouville boat. Pierre took his seat on a wooden bench at the very end of the boat.

He asked himself:

"Was she disturbed by my question about the portrait, or only surprised? Has she mislaid it, or hidden it? Does she know, or does she not know, where it is? If she has hidden it, why did she do so?"

Advancing steadily from deduction to deduction, he reached this conclusion:

The portrait, the portrait of a friend, the portrait of a dear friend, had re-

mained in the parlor in full view till the day when the wife or the mother had been the first to perceive, before any one else, that it resembled her son. Doubtless, for a long time she had been looking for this resemblance; and when she detected it, and recognized the fact that every one might, some day or other, detect it also, she had one evening removed the dangerous little miniature, and, not daring to destroy it, had concealed it.

Pierre now remembered very well that the miniature had disappeared long before their departure from Paris. It had disappeared, he believed, when the growth of Jean's beard brought out the likeness between him and the fair-haired young man who was smiling in the picture.

The motion of the boat as she put off disturbed the course of his thoughts. He rose and looked at the sea.

The little steamer passed the piers, turned to the left, and puffing, panting and quivering, took her course to the distant coast, which was visible through the morning mist. Here and there the red sail of some heavy fishing smack, lying motionless on the smooth sea, had the appearance of a big rock rising from the water. The Seine, as it flowed from Rouen, looked like a large inlet of the sea, dividing two neighboring countries.

In less than an hour Trouville was reached, and, as it was the time for bathing, Pierre betook himself to the beach.

From a distance, it had the look of a long garden full of blooming flowers. On the great stretch of yellow sand, reaching from the pier to the Roches Noires, parasols of every color, hats of every shape, dresses of every shade, were seen in groups before the bathing houses, in lines along the beach, or scattered here and there, looking actually like enormous bouquets on a boundless prairie. The confused sounds, near or far, of voices sharpened by the thin air, the calls, the cries of children wading in the surf, the clear laughter of women, all mingled in a gentle, unceasing murmur, which blended with the imperceptible sea air, and was absorbed with it.

Pierre walked in the middle of these people, more lost, more separated from them, more isolated, more immersed in torturing thought, than if he had been flung from a ship's deck into the sea, a hundred leagues from shore. He brushed against them; he heard, without listening, a few phrases; and he saw, without looking, the men talk to the women, and the women smile on the men.

Then, all at once, as if awaking from sleep, he perceived them distinctly; and a feeling of hatred seized him, for they seemed happy and content.

He went on, brushing against the groups and walking round them, a prey to new thoughts. All these many-colored toilets that covered the sands like so many flowers, these pretty materials, these showy sunshades, all the ingenious inventions of fashion, from the tiny shoe to the extravagant hat, the seduction of gesture, voice and smile—the whole coquetry displayed on the beach—suddenly seemed to him an immense unfolding of feminine perversity. All these dressed-up women wanted to please, to captivate, to tempt, some one. They had made themselves beautiful for men, for all men except the husband whom they no longer needed to conquer. They had made themselves beautiful for

the lover of to-day and the lover of to-morrow; for the stranger they met, noticed, perhaps expected.

And these men seated by them, gazing into their eyes, speaking to them with faces close together, attracted them, desired them, hunted them like game, like elusive and fleeing game, although it seemed so near and so easy. The beach was, then, only a market-place, where some sold themselves and others gave themselves, where some bargained for their caresses and others only held out promises. All these women had only one thought—to make them desire that which was already given, sold, or promised to other men. And he reflected that it was always the same thing, the whole world over.

His mother had done like the rest; that was all! Like the rest? No! There were exceptions—many, many exceptions. The women he saw around him, rich, silly seekers for love, were, on the whole, coquettes of the elegant world of fashion, or even coquettes of a more brazen kind; for respectable women did not mingle with this beach crowd, this legion of idlers.

The tide rose gradually, driving before it the first line of bathers. Groups were seen to rise with a start, and run from the yellow wave fringed with foam, taking their chairs with them.

The bathing boxes on wheels, drawn by a horse, were also taken in shore; and on the boardwalk, which ran along the beach from one end to the other, there was now an unbroken, dense, slow stream of elegant toilets, which formed two contrary currents, that jostled and mingled. Pierre, in a state of nervous exasperation, fled and plunged into the town, where he took breakfast at an ordinary wine shop near the outskirts.

When he had taken his coffee, he stretched himself out on two chairs before the door, and, as he had scarcely slept the night before, dozed in the shadow of a lime tree.

After some hours of repose, he roused himself, and, seeing that it was time to return to catch the boat, he set out, feeling overcome by a sudden weakness that had fallen on him during his slumber. He was determined to return, and learn if his mother had found the portrait of Maréchal. Would she mention it first, or would he have to ask her again? Beyond question, if she waited till he interrogated her once more, she had a secret reason for not showing the portrait.

But when he had entered his room he hesitated to go down to dinner. He was suffering too much. His throbbing heart had not yet calmed itself. However, he made up his mind, and appeared in the dining-room as they were sitting down to table.

They all appeared to be very happy.

"Well," said Roland, "how are you getting on with your shopping? I do not want to see anything before it's all in place."

His wife replied:

"Oh, very well. Only it requires a good deal of thought to avoid making a mismatch. The question of furniture is taking up our attention."

She had spent the day visiting with Jean the carpet stores and furniture stores. She wanted rich materials, rather gaudy, to strike the eye. Her son, on the other hand, wanted something simple, but elegant. So, over every sample shown them, they both of them reiterated their opinions. She

maintained that the client required to be impressed, that he ought to feel, when he entered the reception room, that it gave the effect of wealth.

Jean, on the contrary, wishing to attract only an opulent and fashionable clientèle, desired to conquer the refined class by his modest and impeccable taste.

The discussion, which had lasted all day, began again with the soup.

Roland had no opinion. He repeated:

"I do not want to hear about anything. I'll go and see it when it is finished."

Madame Roland appealed to the judgment of her elder son.

"Come, Pierre, what do you think?"

His nerves were so excited that he longed to reply with an oath. He said, however, in a dry tone, vibrating with indignation:

"Oh, I quite agree with Jean, for my part! I like simplicity, which, as regards taste, is comparable to uprightness as regards character."

His mother resumed:

"Remember, we live in a town of business people, where good taste is not met everywhere."

Pierre replied:

"What matter? Is that a reason to imitate fools? If my townsfolk are stupid or dishonest, am I bound to follow their example? A good woman will not commit a fault because her neighbors set her a bad example."

Jean burst into laughter.

"Your comparisons sound as if they were taken from the maxims of a moralist."

Pierre made no rejoinder, and his mother and brother recommenced their talk of draperies and easy-chairs.

He looked at them as he had looked at his mother, in the morning, before he left for Trouville. He looked at them like an observant stranger; and, in fact, he felt as if he had, all at once, entered a stranger's family.

His father, in particular, astonished him as he looked at him and thought about him. This fat, flabby man, this contented simpleton, was his father—his! No, no, Jean was not a bit like him.

His family! Two days ago an unknown, maleficent hand, the hand of a dead man, had rent and shattered, one by one, all the bonds that held together these four souls. It was all over; they were broken forever. No mother now for him, for he could not love her when he could not venerate her with that absolute, tender and pious respect which is necessary to the filial heart. No brother now for him, for this brother was the child of a stranger. There remained for him only a father—this fat man, whom he could not love in spite of himself.

He said abruptly:

"Oh, mamma, did you find that portrait?"

She opened her eyes in surprise.

"What portrait?"

"Maréchal's."

"No—that is, yes; I have not found it, but I think I know where it is."

"What are you talking about?" Roland inquired.

Pierre answered:

"A miniature of Maréchal's, that used to be in our little parlor in Paris. I thought that Jean might like to have it."

Roland exclaimed:

"Yes, certainly, I remember it perfectly. I saw it as lately as the end of

last week. Your mother pulled it out of her desk when she was arranging her papers. It was Thursday or Friday. You remember, Louise, don't you? I was just going to shave when you took it from a drawer and placed it on a chair beside you, with a heap of letters, half of which you burned. Why, is it not strange that you should have handled that portrait scarcely two or three days before Jean's legacy came? If I believed in presentiments, I should call that one."

Madame Roland quietly replied:

"Yes, I know where it is. I will go and get it at once."

Then she had been lying! She had lied that very morning, when she replied to her son's question as to what had become of the miniature: "I do not know exactly—perhaps I have it in my desk."

She had seen it, touched it, handled it, looked at it, a few days before, and then she had put it back in the secret drawer with some letters—his letters.

Pierre looked at his mother who had lied to him. He looked at her with the exasperated wrath of a deceived son whose sacred affection had been betrayed, and with the jealousy of a man who, after being blinded for a long time, at length detects a shameful treason. If he had been that woman's husband, he, her son, he would have seized her by the wrists, by the shoulders, or by the hair, and have hurled her to the ground, and have struck, wounded and crushed her! Yet he could say nothing, do nothing, state nothing, reveal nothing. He was her son, he had nothing to avenge, he had not been betrayed.

But yes, she had betrayed his affection, his filial respect. She owed it to him to be irreproachable, as all mothers owe it to their children. If his anger amounted almost to hatred, it was because he felt her to be more criminal toward him than toward his father himself.

The love of man and wife is a voluntary pact, where the frail one is guilty of perfidy only; but when a wife becomes a mother, she is more responsible, for Nature has confided to her a race. If she succumbs then, she is cowardly, unworthy, infamous!

"Well, well," said Roland suddenly, extending his legs under the table, as he did every evening, to sip his glass of ratafia. "It is not unpleasant to be idle when one has a little competence. I hope Jean will invite us to some special dinners now, even if I should sometimes get a pain in my stomach."

Then, turning to his wife:

"Go bring the portrait, dear, as you have done eating. I should like to see it again."

She rose, took a candle, and left the room. After an absence which seemed long to Pierre, although it only lasted three minutes, Madame Roland returned, smiling, and holding by its ring an old-fashioned gilt frame.

"Here it is," she said. "I found it almost at once."

The doctor was the first to extend his hand. He took the portrait and examined it, holding it at arm's length. Then, feeling that his mother was looking at him, he slowly raised his eyes to his brother's face to compare it with the picture. He almost said in the impulse of his violence: "Why, this is like Jean." If he did not dare to utter these terrible words, he displayed his thoughts by the way in which he compared the

living face and the painted face.

They had, certainly, some traits in common, the same beard and the same brow, but nothing definite enough to warrant the declaration, "There is the father, and here is the son." It was rather a family resemblance, a similarity of physiognomy as of those in whose veins flows the same blood. But what was more decisive to Pierre's mind than this look in the two faces was the fact that his mother rose, turned her back, and, with unnecessary delay, pretended to lock up the sugar and liqueurs in the closet.

She saw that he knew or at least suspected.

"Hand it to me," said Roland. Pierre handed over the miniature, and his father drew the candle nearer to see it better. Then in a softened tone he said:

"Poor fellow! To think that he was like that when we knew him. Heavens, how time flies! He was a handsome man, all the same, at that period, and pleasant in his manners. Was he not, Louise?

As his wife did not reply, he continued:

"And what an even temper! I never saw him in a bad humor. Well, it's over; there's nothing remaining of him —except what he left to Jean. We can swear that he showed himself a good and loyal friend to the end. Even when dying, he did not forget us."

Jean, in his turn, extended his arm to take the portrait. He looked at it for some moments, and then said, in a tone of regret:

"I do not recognize him at all. I can only remember him with white hair." And he returned the miniature to his mother. She cast on it a rapid glance which was soon withdrawn, and seemed timid; then said, in her natural voice:

"It belongs to you, now, Jean, since you are his heir. We must take it to your new rooms."

As they entered the parlor, she placed the miniature on the mantelpiece, near the clock, where it used to stand.

Roland filled his pipe, Pierre and Jean lighted cigarettes. Usually one brother would smoke walking up and down the room; the other, buried in an easy-chair, with his legs crossed. The father always sat astride a chair, and spat into the fireplace.

Madame Roland, on her low seat, near a little table on which stood the lamp, usually did embroidery, knitted, or marked the linen.

This evening she commenced a piece of wool embroidery for Jean's bedroom. It was a difficult and complicated piece of work, and required all her attention to start it. Nevertheless, from time to time, while counting the stitches, she would raise her eyes and give a furtive glance at the little portrait of the dead man which was leaning against the clock. The doctor, as he crossed the narrow room in four or five strides, his hands behind his back and his cigarette between his lips, would encounter his mother's look every time.

One might say they were playing the spy on each other, and that war would be declared between them; and a painful unrest, an insupportable unrest, wrung Pierre's heart. Tortured and satisfied at the same time, he said to himself: "How she must be suffering at this moment, if she knows that I have found her out!" And, at each return toward the fireplace, he stopped for a

few seconds to look at the blond countenance of Maréchal, just to show that a fixed idea haunted him. And the little portrait, smaller than an open hand, seemed a living, malevolent, dangerous personage that had suddenly entered this house and this family.

Suddenly the doorbell rang. Madame Roland, always so calm, was startled, and the start revealed to the doctor her condition of nervousness.

She said, however: "It must be Madame Rosémilly," and her anxious glance reverted again to the mantelpiece.

Pierre understood, or thought he understood, her terror and her anguish. Women's eyes are sharp, their wits nimble, their minds suspicious. When the incoming visitor should perceive this unknown miniature, she might, perhaps, at the first glance, discover the resemblance between that face and Jean's face. Then she would know and understand it all! He was seized with dread, a sudden, horrible dread, that the disgrace would be unveiled; and, turning back as the door opened, he took the portrait and slid it under the clock without his father or brother seeing the action.

As he again encountered his mother's eyes, they seemed to him changed, troubled and haggard.

"Good-day," said Madame Rosémilly; "I have come to take a cup of tea with you."

While they gathered about her to ask how she was, Pierre disappeared by the door that had been left open.

They were surprised when they discovered his departure. Jean, who feared the young woman would deem it rude, murmured:

"What a bear!"

Madame Roland replied:

"You must not be angry with him—he is not very well to-day, and, moreover, is tired with his journey to Trouville."

"No matter," rejoined Roland. "That's no reason for going off like a savage."

Madame Rosémilly tried to smooth things down by saying:

"No, no. He took leave *à l'anglaise*. In society that is always the way when one leaves early."

"Well," replied Jean, "that may be so in society; but one does not treat one's family *à l'anglaise*, and that is what my brother has been doing the last few days."

CHAPTER VI

BITTER AND SWEET

Things went on thus in the Roland household for a week or two. The father went fishing, as usual; Jean, with his mother's assistance, moved into his new rooms; Pierre showed his gloomy countenance only at mealtimes.

His father asked him one evening:

"Why the devil do you look as if you were at a funeral? I have noticed it before to-day."

And the doctor replied:

"Because I feel the terrible burden of life."

The old fellow understood nothing of his meaning, and with an air of disappointment, continued:

"Upon my word, it is too bad! Ever since we had the luck to receive that legacy, everybody seems miserable; just as if some accident had happened to us, or as if we were in mourning for some one."

"I am in mourning for some one," said Pierre.

"You! for whom?"

"Some one you did not know, and whom I loved too well."

Roland imagined he was talking of some love affair, and asked:

"A woman, of course?"

"Yes, a woman."

"Dead?"

"No, worse. Lost!"

"Ah!"

Although he was astonished at this unexpected confidence made to him in his wife's presence, and at his son's strange tone, he did not pursue the subject, for he thought that such matters did not concern a third party.

Madame Roland seemed not to have heard; she was very pale, and more than once looked ill.

Her husband, seeing her sink into a chair, and hearing her breathe as if respiration were difficult, had said to her:

"You really look ill, Louise; you are tiring yourself out, probably, getting Jean settled. Rest a bit, confound it all! He is in no hurry, the young scamp, well, for he is rich."

She shook her head without speaking.

Her pallor on this day was so remarkable that Roland again noticed it.

"Come," he said, "this won't do at all, my poor old girl; we must look after you."

Then, turning to his son:

"You see, don't you, that she is ill? You have examined her, I suppose?"

Pierre replied:

"No; I did not notice that she was ailing."

"Why, a blind man could see it," said old Roland furiously. "What's the use of being a doctor, if you cannot even see that your mother is indisposed? Now, look at her! Just look at her! No, indeed; one might be dying, and this doctor here would not notice it."

Madame Roland breathed heavily, and grew so pale that her husband exclaimed:

"She's going to faint!"

"No—no—it is nothing! It will pass off—it is nothing."

Pierre had approached her, and was looking at her fixedly.

"Come, what is the matter?" he said.

"Nothing—nothing, I assure you—nothing," she repeated in a low, hurried voice.

Roland had gone for some spirits of ammonia; he returned, and, handing the bottle to his son, said:

"Here—do something for her. You have felt her pulse, of course?"

As Pierre bent forward to take her wrist, she drew back her hand with such an abrupt movement that it struck a chair near her.

"Come," he said in a cold tone, "let me attend to you, as you are ill."

She rose and held out her arm. Her skin was burning, her pulse irregular and hard. He muttered:

"It is really pretty serious. You must

take a sedative. I'll go and write a prescription."

While he was bending over the paper, writing, a slight sound of suppressed sighs, of choking, of short, interrupted breathing, made him suddenly turn round.

She was weeping, with her hands over her face.

Roland, in alarm, asked:

"Louise, Louise, what is the matter? What is the matter?"

She made no response, and seemed torn by some horrible and profound sorrow.

Her husband tried to take hold of her hands and pull them from her face. She resisted, repeating:

"No, no, no."

Then he turned to his son:

"Why, what is the matter with her? I never saw her like this."

"It is nothing," said Pierre; "a slight nervous attack."

It seemed to him as if his heart was consoled by the sight of her anguish, and that this grief lightened his resentment and diminished her burden of opprobrium. He looked at her like a judge satisfied with his work.

But all at once she rose and rushed to the door, so suddenly and abruptly that it could neither be foreseen nor prevented, and ran to shut herself up in her room.

Father and son were left face to face.

"Do you understand anything of the case?" said the former.

"Yes," replied the latter. "It comes from a simple little nervous disturbance which often declares itself at mamma's age. It is likely that she will have many more attacks like this one."

Indeed, she had others, nearly every day; attacks which Pierre seemed to provoke by a single word, as if he held the secret of her strange and unknown trouble. He looked out for intermissions of repose in her face, and, with all the art of a torturer, awoke by a single word the grief which for a moment had been calmed.

And he suffered as much as she did. He suffered frightfully from the fact that he no longer loved her, no longer respected her, and that he was torturing her. When he had uncovered the wound that he had opened in the heart of this wife and mother, when he felt how wretched and how desperate she was, he would wander all alone through the town, so pierced with remorse, so racked with pity, so woebegone at seeing her thus crushed by his filial contempt, that he was tempted to fling himself into the sea and drown himself to make an end of it all.

Oh, how he wished to pardon her now! But he could not, for he was unable to forget. If he only could have avoided causing her suffering! But he could not do that, either, for he was always suffering himself. He returned home at mealtimes, full of gentler resolutions. Then, when he caught sight of her, when he saw her eyes—once so frank and direct, now timid, distracted, shrinking—he spoke in spite of himself, for he could not keep back the treacherous phrase which rose to his lips.

The shameful secret, known to them alone, spurred him on against her. It was a poison that he had at present in his veins, and that made him long to bite like a mad dog.

There was nothing now to prevent his torturing her unceasingly; for Jean lived almost altogether in his new

rooms, and returned home every evening only to dine and sleep with his family.

He often noticed the bitter words and violent manner of his brother, but attributed them to jealousy. He promised himself that he would put him in his proper place and give him a lesson some day or other, for the family life was becoming very unpleasant, owing to these continual scenes. But, as he lived out of the house at this time, he suffered less from Pierre's offensive rudeness, and his love of peace induced him to be patient. Besides, his good fortune had intoxicated him, and his thoughts were occupied chiefly with matters that directly interested himself alone. He would come in full of new little cares, occupied with the cut of a jacket, the shape of a felt hat, the proper size of visiting cards. And he talked persistently about all the details of his apartment—of shelves placed in the bedroom cupboard to hold his linen, of wardrobes placed in the vestibule, and of electric burglar alarms.

It had been decided that when he formally moved into his new apartment there should be an excursion to Saint Jouin, and that, after dinner, the party should return and take tea with him. Roland wished to go by sea; but the distance and the uncertainty as to the time when they would arrive by this route, if the wind was contrary, led them to reject his proposal, and a carriage was hired for the occasion.

They started about ten o'clock, so as to arrive for breakfast. The dusty high-road traversed this Norman country district, to which the undulating plains and tree-girt farms gave the appearance of a limitless park. As the carriage rolled on at a slow trot drawn by two heavy horses, the Roland family, Madame Rosémilly and Captain Beausire, deafened by the noise of the wheels, remained silent, and closed their eyes amid a cloud of dust.

The harvest was ripe. Beside the dull green of the clover, and the bright green of the beets, the fields of yellow grain lighted up the landscape with a tawny golden gleam. They seemed to have absorbed the sunlight that fell upon them. Here and there the reapers were at work; and in the fields under the scythe the laborers were seen, swinging rhythmically as they swept the huge, wing-shaped blade over the surface of the ground.

After a drive of two hours, the carriage turned to the left, passed a windmill in motion—a gray, melancholy wreck, half rotten and condemned, the last survivor of the old mills—and then entered a pretty courtyard, and drew up before a gay little house, a celebrated inn of the district.

The landlady, who was named *La Belle Alphonsine,* came smiling to the door, and extended her hand to the two ladies, who were hesitating at the carriage step, which was awkwardly high.

On the margin of the lawn, beneath the shade of some apple trees, a party of strangers were already breakfasting in a tent; they were Parisians returning from Étretat, and the sound of voices and laughter and the rattle of dishes could be heard in the house.

All the large halls being occupied, they had to dine in a private room. Monsieur Roland suddenly saw some shrimp nets hanging on the wall.

"Ah, ha!" he cried, "do they fish for prawns here?"

"Yes," replied Beausire, "this is the very spot where they take more than on any other part of the coast."

"The devil! Let us go there after breakfast!"

It was ascertained that it was low water at three o'clock, and it was resolved that all the party should pass the afternoon on the rocks looking for shrimps.

They ate sparingly, to avoid a rush of blood to the head when they put their feet in the water. They wished, also, to reserve their appetites for dinner, which was ordered on a grand scale, to be ready at six when they returned.

Roland could not control his impatience. He wanted to buy the special apparatus for this kind of fishing, which resembles very much the nets used to catch butterflies in the fields.

Alphonsine, still smiling, lent them the nets; then she assisted the ladies in improvising a costume, so as to avoid wetting their dresses; she lent them some petticoats, thick worsted stockings, and bathing slippers. The men took off their boots, and replaced them with some wooden shoes purchased from the local cobbler.

They started out, net on shoulder and basket on back. Madame Rosémilly was charming in this costume, with an unexpected, rustic, bold style of beauty.

The petticoat borrowed from Alphonsine, coquettishly raised and held by a few stitches, so as to enable the wearer to run and leap, without fear, among the rocks, displayed the well-formed ankle of a woman at once agile and strong. She had found, to cover her head, an immense gardener's hat of yellow straw, with an enormous brim, which she turned up on one side with a sprig of tamarisk, which gave her the dauntless air of a dashing mousquetaire.

Jean, since receiving his legacy, had asked himself every day whether he should marry her or not. Each time he saw her he decided to make her his wife; but when he was alone he thought that by waiting he would have time to reflect. She was not as rich as he was now, for she had an income of only twelve thousand francs a year, but the principal was invested in real estate, in farms, and lots in Havre, on the docks, and this might, in time, be worth a large sum. Their fortunes, thus, were almost equal, and the young widow certainly pleased him very much.

As he now saw her walking before him, he thought, "Well, I must decide. Beyond question, I could not do better."

They followed the slope of a little valley, descending from the village to the cliff, and the cliff at the end of this valley was nearly three hundred feet above the sea. Framed by green banks descending to right and left of it, a spacious watery triangle, silvery blue in the sunlight, could be seen, and a scarcely perceptible sail looked like an insect on its surface. The sky, filled with radiance, blended with the water so that the eye could not distinguish a dividing line, and the two ladies, who walked in advance of the three men, cast on this clear horizon the clear-cut outline of their compact figures.

Jean, with ardent glance, saw speeding before him the well-turned ankle, the supple waist, and the enticing hat of Madame Rosémilly. Her swift motion stimulated his eagerness and impelled him to those decisive steps which the timid and irresolute are apt to take

abruptly. The warm air, in which was blended the odor of the coast, of the gorse, the clover, the grasses, and the marine odor of the rocks uncovered by the tide, intoxicated his senses still further, and he became a little more decided every second at each step, at every look he cast on the graceful outline of the young woman. He decided to hesitate no longer, but to tell her that he loved her, and wanted to marry her. The fishing party would help him; it would render a *tête-à-tête* more easy, and, besides, it would furnish a pretty background, a pretty scene for words of love, with their feet in a basin of limpid water, as they watched the long feelers of the shrimps darting through the seaweed.

When they reached the end of the valley at the edge of the bluff, they perceived a little path that ran down the cliff; and beneath them, about halfway between the sea and the foot of the precipice, a wondrous chaos of enormous rocks that had fallen or been hurled down, heaped one on the other on a kind of grassy, broken plain, that disappeared toward the south, and which had been formed by ancient landslips. On this long strip of brushwood and turf, shaken down, one might say, by volcanic action, the fallen rocks resembled the ruins of a great vanished city, that, once on a time, had looked down on the ocean, itself dominated by the white and endless wall of the cliff.

"How beautiful!" said Madame Rosémilly, pausing.

Jean joined her, and with beating heart offered his hand to guide her down the narrow stairway cut in the cliff.

They went on ahead, while Beausire, straightening himself on his short legs, held out his bent arm to Madame Roland, who grew dizzy at sight of the abyss beneath her.

Roland and Pierre came last; and the doctor had to support his father, who was so overcome by dizziness that he sat down, and slid thus from step to step.

The young people at the head of the party went rapidly, and suddenly caught sight of a spring of clear water spurting from a little hole in the cliff, by the side of a wooden bench which formed a resting place about the middle of the slope. The water at first spread into a basin about the size of a wash-hand bowl, which it had excavated for itself, and then, falling in a cascade of about two feet in height, flowed across the path where a carpet of cress had grown, and then disappeared in the reeds and grass, across the upheaved plain on which were the rocks.

"Oh, how thirsty I am!" cried Madame Rosémilly.

But how could they drink? She tried to scoop up some water in her hands, but it escaped between her fingers. Jean had a bright idea; he placed a stone in the road, and she knelt on it to drink from the spring itself, which was now on a level with her mouth.

When she raised her head, covered with glittering drops sprinkled by thousands over her face, her hair, her eyelashes, Jean, bending toward her, whispered:

"How pretty you are!"

She replied in the tone one assumes in scolding a child:

"Will you hold your tongue!"

These words were their first attempt at flirtation.

"Come," said Jean, very much dis-

comfited, "let us be off before they overtake us."

She perceived, indeed, that Captain Beausire was quite close to them. He was descending backward in order to support Madame Roland with both hands, while, higher up and farther away, M. Roland, in a sitting posture, was dragging himself down by his feet and elbows with the speed of a tortoise, and Pierre went before him to superintend his movements.

The path became less steep, and now formed a sloping road that skirted the enormous blocks that had formerly fallen from the cliff. Madame Rosémilly and Jean began to run, and were soon on the shingle. They crossed it to gain the rocks, which stretched out in a long flat surface covered with seaweed, amid which gleamed innumerable patches of water. The tide was very low beyond this slimy surface of glistening green and black wrack.

Jean rolled up his trousers to the knee, and his sleeves to the elbow, so as to go into the water without fear of getting wet, and cried "Forward," as he boldly leaped into the first pool that presented itself.

With more prudence, though with equal determination to wade into the water at once, the young woman went round the narrow basin with timid steps, for she slipped on the slimy weeds.

"Do you see anything?" she said.

"Yes, I see your face reflected in the water."

"If you see only that, you will not have any fishing to boast of."

He said in a tender voice:

"Ah, that is what I should prefer to capture above all things!"

She laughed.

"Try, then, and you'll see how it slips through your net."

"Well, if you would like——"

"I would like to see you catch some prawns—and nothing more—just at present."

"You are cruel. Let us go farther; there is nothing here."

He offered her his hands to steady her on the greasy rocks. She leaned on it rather timidly; and he, all at once, felt his being invaded by love's vibrations, filled with longing, as if the passion that had lain dormant in him had waited for that day to burst forth.

They soon reached a deeper pool where, beneath the rippling water that reached the distant sea by an invisible channel, long, fine seaweed of bright colors, like pink and green hair, floated as if it were swimming.

Madame Rosémilly exclaimed:

"Look, look, I see one—a big one, a very big one, down there!"

He perceived it in turn and went down into the pool, although the water wet him to the waist.

But the creature, moving its long feelers, quietly retreated before the net. Jean drove it toward the wrack, sure of catching it there. When it found itself blockaded, it made a sudden dash over the net, crossed the pool, and disappeared.

The young woman, who was eagerly watching his attempt, could not refrain from crying:

"Ah, clumsy!"

He was vexed, and, without thinking, dragged his net through a pool full of weeds. As he raised it to the surface, he saw in it three large transparent prawns, which had been dragged unex-

pectedly from their invisible hiding place.

He presented them in triumph to Madame Rosémilly, who dared not touch them for fear of the sharp, dentated point that arms their heads.

At last she decided to take them; and, seizing them between two of her fingers, she placed them, one after the other, in her basket, with some seaweed to keep them alive. Then, on finding a shallower piece of water, she stepped into it with hesitating steps, and catching her breath as the cold struck her feet, began to catch shrimps herself. She was skillful and cunning, with a supple wrist and a sportsman's instinct. Almost at every cast she brought out some victims, whom she deceived and surprised by the ingenious slowness with which she swept the pool.

Jean was catching nothing; but he followed her step by step, touched her dress, bent over her, pretended to be in despair at his awkwardness, and wished her to teach him.

"Show me how," he said, "show me!"

Then as their two faces were reflected, one beside the other, in the clear water, which the deep-growing seaweed formed into a limpid mirror, Jean smiled at the face so near his which looked up to him from below, and at times threw to it, from the tips of his fingers, a kiss which seemed to fall on it.

"Oh, how tiresome you are," the young woman said. "My dear fellow, never do two things at the same time."

He replied:

"I am only doing one. I love you."

She drew herself up and said in a serious tone:

"Come, now! What is the matter with you for the last ten minutes? Have you lost your head?"

"No, I have not lost my head. I love you, and at last dare to tell you so."

They were now standing in the pool of seawater that rose nearly to their knees, and, with their dripping hands leaning on their nets, looked into the depth of each other's eyes.

She resumed in a playful but rather annoyed tone:

"You have taken a wrong time to speak to me. Could you not wait another day, and not spoil my fishing?"

He murmured:

"Pardon me, but I could not keep silence. I have loved you for a long time. To-day you have completely turned my head."

Then she seemed at once to take her resolution, and to resign herself to talk business and renounce amusement.

"Let us sit on this rock," she said; "we shall be able to talk quietly."

They climbed on a rock a little higher; and when they were seated, side by side, their feet hanging down in the sunlight, she rejoined:

"My friend, you are no longer a child, and I am not a young girl. Both of us know what we are about, and can weigh all the consequences of our acts. If you decide to-day to declare your love to me, I suppose naturally you wish to marry me."

He had scarcely expected such a clear statement of the situation, and answered sheepishly:

"Why, yes!"

"Have you spoken to your father and mother?"

"No. I wished to know if you would accept me."

She extended to him her hand, which

was still wet, and as he placed his own in it with fervor:

"I am willing," she said. "I believe you to be good and loyal. But do not forget that I would not displease your parents."

"Do you think that my mother has foreseen nothing, and that she would love you as she does if she did not desire a marriage between us?"

"Nevertheless, I am somewhat disturbed."

They were silent. On his part, he was astonished that she was so little disturbed and so sensible. He expected some pretty airs and graces, refusals which say yes, a whole coquettish comedy of love blended with fishing and the splashing of water. And it was all over; he felt himself bound and married in a score of words. They had nothing more to say now that they understood each other; and both remained somewhat embarrassed at what had passed so rapidly between them, and were even somewhat confused, not venturing to speak or to fish, not knowing what to do.

The voice of M. Roland came to the rescue.

"This way, this way, young people! Come and see Beausire. He is emptying the sea, the old rascal."

The captain, indeed, had marvellous success. Wet up to the loins, he went from pool to pool, detecting at a glance the best spots, and with a slow, sure movement of his net searching every cavity beneath the seaweed.

And the pretty, transparent prawns, of a light gray color, danced about on the hollow of his hand as he took them out of the net to fling them into his basket.

Madame Rosémilly, surprised and delighted, kept close beside him, imitating him as well as she could, almost forgetting her promise and Jean, who was dreamily following her, to abandon herself to the childish pleasure of collecting the little creatures beneath the floating grasses.

Roland suddenly broke the silence by exclaiming:

"Here is Madame Roland coming to join us."

At first she had remained with Pierre on the beach, for neither of them had any desire to amuse themselves by running over the rocks and splashing themselves in the pools, and yet they hesitated about remaining together. She was afraid of him, and her son was afraid of her and of himself—afraid of his cruelty which he could not master.

They sat down then beside each other on the shingle, and in the warm sunshine tempered by the sea air, in presence of the limitless horizon of blue water with silver reflections, both thought at the same time, "How pleasant it would have been for us here, once upon a time!"

She dared not speak to Pierre, for she knew that his answer would be harsh; he dared not speak to his mother, for he knew, too, that in spite of himself he would speak rudely.

He poked among the round pebbles with his cane, pushing and striking them. She had picked up three or four little stones, which she slowly and mechanically passed from one hand to the other. Her wandering glances presently discovered, in the middle of the field of seaweed before her, her son Jean fishing with Madame Rosémilly. She followed them with her eyes, watching

their movements, and clearly comprehending with her maternal instinct that they were not talking in their usual manner. She saw them bending over side by side as they looked at each other in the water, standing up, face to face, when they questioned their hearts, and then climbing to a seat on the rock to converse with each other.

Their outlines stood out clearly defined on the horizon, looking like symbolic statues amid this wide expanse of sky, sea and cliff.

Pierre also looked at them, and a hard laugh escaped from his lips.

Without turning her head, Madame Roland said:

"What is the matter?"

Still with his sardonic smile, he replied:

"I'm taking a lesson. I am learning how men prepare themselves to be the dupes of women."

She gave a start of anger and revolt, exasperated at what she took to be his meaning.

"For whom do you mean that?"

"For Jean, by Jove. It is comical to see them."

She replied in a low voice, trembling with emotion:

"Oh, Pierre, how cruel you are! That woman is uprightness itself. Your brother could not choose better."

He laughed aloud, a forced, jesting laugh.

"Ha! ha! ha! Uprightness itself! All women are uprightness itself, and all husbands fools. Ha! ha! ha!"

She rose without replying and rapidly descended the shingly slope; and at the risk of slipping, falling into the holes concealed by the weeds, or of breaking her leg or arm, she went, without looking, almost at a run, across the pools straight toward her other son.

Jean, seeing her approach, cried to her:

"Well, mamma, have you made up your mind to join us?"

Without replying, she seized his arm, as to say, "Save me! Protect me!"

He saw her trouble, and in great surprise said:

"How pale you are! What is the matter?"

"I almost fell. I am timid on these rocks."

Jean guided her, supported her, explained the sport, and tried to interest her. But as she scarcely listened, and as he felt an intense need of confiding in some one, he drew her aside, and said, in a low voice:

"Guess what I have done."

"Why—why—I cannot!"

"Guess."

"I—I cannot."

"Well, then, I have told Madame Rosémilly that I wanted to marry her."

She made no reply; her head was in a whirl, her soul distressed so that she could hardly understand.

She repeated:

"Marry her?"

"Yes. Have I done right? She is charming, is she not?"

"Yes, charming. You have done right."

"Then you approve?"

"Yes, I approve."

"How oddly you say that! One might fancy that—that you were not pleased."

"Oh, yes. I am—pleased."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure."

To prove it, she took him in her

arms and kissed him with a mother's fondest kisses.

Then, when she had wiped her eyes, which had filled with tears, she perceived down on the beach a figure lying face downward, looking like a corpse, with its face on the shingle. It was the other brother, Pierre, who was brooding in despair.

She led her "little Jean" farther away still, quite to the water's edge, and they talked long about the marriage which lay so near his heart.

The rising tide drove them toward the others, whom they rejoined, and the whole party ascended the beach to the cliff, arousing Pierre, who pretended to be asleep. They sat long at dinner, which was moistened with plenty of wine.

CHAPTER VII

THE THUNDERBOLT

As they drove home all the men except Jean were sleepy. Beausire and Roland would drop their heads every five minutes on some neighboring shoulder, which shook them off with a shrug. They then drew themselves up, stopped snoring, opened their eyes, and said, "Very fine weather," and almost immediately fell over asleep again on the other side. When they reached Havre their drowsiness was so profound that they could scarcely shake it off; and Beausire even refused to go up to Jean's rooms, where tea was awaiting them. They put him down at his own door.

The young lawyer for the first time was going to sleep in his new apartments; and he rejoiced, with a somewhat puerile joy, at the opportunity of showing, this very evening, to the woman he was engaged to, the rooms she would soon occupy.

The servant girl had gone. Madame Roland had declared that she would boil the water and serve the tea herself, as she did not like servants to sit up, for fear of fire.

No one except Madame Roland, her son, and the workmen had yet entered the rooms, so that the surprise might be complete when it was seen how pretty they were.

When they entered the vestibule Jean begged them to wait. He wished to light the candles and lamps; and he left Madame Rosémilly, his father, and brother in the dark till he exclaimed "Enter!" and threw wide the folding doors.

The glass corridor, lighted by a chandelier and glass globes of various colors concealed amid the palms, india-rubber trees, and flowers, seemed at first like a scene in a theatre. There was a pause of admiration, and Roland, astonished at this luxury, felt a desire to clap his hands as at a transformation scene.

They next entered the first reception room, a small room with hangings of old gold to match the chairs. The large room for the reception of clients was

very simple, of pale salmon color, and had an air of elegant severity.

Jean sat down in the armchair before his book-laden desk, and in a grave, rather forced voice, said:

"Yes, madame, the authorities are explicit, and, with the assent which I announced to you, give me absolute assurance that within three months the affair of which we spoke will be satisfactorily settled."

He looked at Madame Rosémilly, who smiled as she looked at Madame Roland, and the latter, taking her hand, pressed it warmly.

Jean was radiant, and, cutting a schoolboy caper, cried:

"How well the voice carries! This room would be excellent to plead a case in."

He began to declaim:

"If humanity alone, if that sentiment of natural sympathy which we feel for all suffering, was to be the ground of the acquittal which we ask from you, we should appeal, gentlemen of the jury, to your pity, to your hearts as fathers and as men; but we have on our side justice, and it is the question of justice alone that we shall bring before you."

Pierre looked at the rooms which might have been his, and was irritated at the child's play of his brother, considering him decidedly silly and witless.

Madame Roland opened a door to the right.

"This is the bedroom," she said.

In furnishing it she had lavished all her maternal affection. The hangings were of Rouen cretonne made to imitate the old Norman material. A Louis Quinze design, a shepherdess in a medallion held by the kissing bills of two doves, gave the walls, curtains, bed and chairs a coquettishly rustic air that was very attractive.

"How charming!" cried Madame Rosémilly, who became rather serious as she entered this room.

"Do you like it?" asked Jean.

"Excessively!"

"If you only knew how pleased I am!" They exchanged a momentary glance of trusting affection.

Still, she was slightly embarrassed, somewhat confused, in this sleeping room which was to be her nuptial chamber. She had noticed, on entering, that the bed was very large, a genuine family affair, chosen by Madame Roland, who had without doubt foreseen and desired the approaching marriage of her son; and this maternal foresight gave her pleasure, for it seemed to say they were expecting her to be one of the family.

When they returned to the reception room, Jean suddenly opened the door to the left, showing the round dining-room, with its three windows and its Japanese decorations. Mother and son had here indulged their fancy without restraint. This room, with its bamboo furniture, images, plaques, gold-embroidered silks, its bead curtain looking like drops of water strung together, its fans nailed to the walls to hold up tapestry, its screens, its swords, its masques, its storks with real feathers, all its little knick-knacks of porcelain, wood, ivory, paper, mother-of-pearl and bronze, had that pretentious, stiff look which awkward hands and ignorant eyes gave to things which require the highest degree of tact, taste and artistic education. Yet this room was the most admired. Pierre alone took some exception, with a rather bitter irony, which

wounded his brother.

The table was decked with fruits in pyramids and cakes piled up in various forms.

No one was very hungry. They ate some fruit, and nibbled at the pastry, and, after the lapse of an hour, Madame Rosémilly demanded permission to retire.

It was decided that M. Roland should escort her to her door, and they started at once; while Madame Roland, in the absence of the servant, cast a housewife's eye over the apartment to see that nothing was lacking.

"Must I come back for you?" Roland asked.

She replied after some hesitation:

"No, my dear, go home and go to bed. Pierre will take me home."

As soon as they had left she blew out the wax candles, locked up the cakes, the sugar, and the liqueurs in a cupboard, the key of which she gave to Jean. Then she went into the bedroom, turned down the bed, and saw if the carafe was filled with fresh water and the window securely closed.

Pierre and Jean remained in the smaller reception room, the latter still sore at his brother's criticism on his taste, the former more and more irritated at seeing his brother in these apartments.

They both sat down and smoked without speaking. Suddenly Pierre exclaimed:

"By George, the widow looked pretty well tired out this evening; excursions do not suit her."

Jean felt himself being overcome by one of those sudden and furious fits of wrath which seize good-natured men when their feelings are wounded.

His breath failed him, so strong was his emotion, as he stammered out.

"For the future do not let me hear you say 'the widow' when you are speaking of Madame Rosémilly."

Pierre turned on him haughtily:

"You are giving me orders, it seems. Are you becoming crazy?"

Jean drew himself up:

"I am not becoming crazy; but I have had enough of your manners toward me."

Pierre gave a grin.

"Toward you? Are you going to fight Madame Rosémilly's battles?"

"Madame Rosémilly is going to be my wife!"

The other laughed still louder.

"Ha! ha! Very good. Now I see why I must not call her 'the widow.' You have, however, taken a very odd way of announcing your marriage to me."

"No jesting—I won't have it. Do you hear? I won't have it!"

Jean came up to him, pale, his voice trembling, exasperated at his ironical way of talking of the woman whom he loved and had chosen.

But Pierre suddenly became just as furious; all his impotent wrath, all the bitterness that he had kept down, all the rebellious feelings he had crushed, and all his silent despair, flew to his head like a congestion of the brain.

"You dare to talk thus? You dare? Be silent, I say! Those are my orders, mine, do you hear? Those are mine!"

Jean, surprised at this violence, was silent for a few seconds, searching, in that confusion of mind into which rage throws us, for something, some sentence, some word, which would pierce his brother to the heart.

He struggled to gain the mastery over

himself in order to make his words tell; and, speaking slowly to make them more cutting, he resumed:

"I have known for a long time that you were jealous of me; ever since the day when you began to say 'the widow' because you knew it annoyed me."

Pierre burst into one of his usual peals of harsh and insulting laughter.

"Ha! ha! *Mon Dieu!* Jealous of you? I jealous of you? I! I! Why? Jealous of what?—your brains or your looks?"

Jean felt that he had touched the wound to the quick.

"Yes. You are jealous of me, jealous since childhood; and you became uncontrollable when you saw this lady prefer me, while she would have nothing to say to you."

"I!—I jealous of you! On account of that silly doll—that plump little goose!"

Jean saw his blows told, and continued:

"How about the day you tried to outrow me in the *Pearl?* And all that you said in her presence, to show yourself off? Why, you are dying of jealousy! When this fortune came to me you became frantic, you detested me, and showed it in every way. You have made us all miserable. There is not an hour when you do not give vent to the anger that is choking you."

Pierre closed his fists in rage, and in an irresistible longing to rush at his brother and seize him by the throat.

"Oh, keep quiet for once! Don't speak of that fortune."

Jean cried:

"Why, jealousy is exuding from every pore of your skin. You cannot say a word to my father, my mother, or me, without letting it burst out. You pretend to despise me, because you are jealous! You pick quarrels with everybody, because you are jealous! And now when I am rich, you can contain yourself no longer; you have become venomous, you torture our mother as if it were her fault!"

Pierre had retreated to the mantelpiece, his mouth half open, his eyes dilated, a prey to one of those paroxysms of rage which lead men to crime.

He repeated in a lower, trembling tone:

"Silence, I say, silence!"

"No! For a long time I have wanted to tell you what I thought. You have given me an opportunity: so much the worse for you! I love a certain woman; you know it, and ridicule her in my presence. You drive me to extremity: so much the worse for you! But I will crush your viper fangs. I will force you to respect me."

"Respect you—you!"

"Yes, me!"

"Respect you—you! who have dishonored us all by your greed!"

"What do you say? Say it again! Say it again!"

"I say one does not accept the fortune of one man when one passes for the son of another."

Jean remained motionless, without comprehending, dazed at the insinuation of which he had a presentiment.

"What! You say—— Say it once more!"

"I say all the world is chattering, all the world is gossiping, that you are the son of the man who left you his fortune. Well, a decent man does not accept wealth which dishonors his mother."

"Pierre — Pierre — Pierre — do you

know what you are saying? Is it you —you, who utter such an infamy?"

"Yes, it is I. Do not you see that I am dying of grief for more than a month; that I pass my nights without sleeping, and my days in hiding myself like a wild beast; that I do not know what I am saying or doing, nor what will become of me, so wretched am I, so crazed with shame and grief? For what was at first a surmise is knowledge now."

"Pierre, be silent! Mamma is in the next room. Remember, she may hear us—she does hear us!"

But he had to pour out his heart. He told everything, his suspicions, his arguments, his struggles, his conviction, and the story of the portrait that had again disappeared.

He spoke in short, detached sentences, almost incoherently, like a person who is crazy.

He seemed to have forgotten Jean, and his mother in the next room. He spoke as though no one heard him, because he had to speak, because he had suffered so much, and had so sternly repressed his sorrow. But now it had broken bounds.

Jean, distracted and almost convinced all at once by his brother's vehement emotion, leaned against the door, behind which he guessed that their mother had heard them.

She could not get out without passing through the parlor. As she had not done so, it was because she dared not.

Suddenly, stamping his foot, Pierre exclaimed:

"Oh, what a beast I am to have talked like this!"

And he rushed bareheaded to the staircase.

The noise of the street door, as it closed with a bang, roused Jean from the deep stupor into which he had sunk. Some seconds passed, seconds longer than some hours, and his mind was benumbed as in the dullness of idiocy. He felt that he would have to think and act before long; but he waited without even the wish to understand or know or recall anything, through fear, weakness and cowardice. He belonged to that class of temporizers who put everything off till to-morrow; and when it was necessary that he should take a resolution on the spot, he always instinctively sought to gain a few moments.

But the profound silence which now surrounded him after the loud exclamations of Pierre, this sudden silence of the walls and the furniture, with the bright gleam of the six candles and two lamps, struck him with such a shock that he longed to run away as his brother had done.

Then he roused himself and tried to think.

He had never encountered any difficulty in his life. He was one of those men who let themselves drift like running water. He had been a good scholar in the classroom to avoid punishment, and had finished his legal studies with regularity because his life was calm. Everything in the world appeared to him natural, without otherwise awakening his attention. He had a temperamental love of order, decency and quiet, and his mind had no kinks in it; and in face of this catastrophe he was like a man who falls into the water without ever having learned to swim.

At first he attempted to doubt his brother. Had he lied from hatred or from jealousy?

And yet, how could he have been such a wretch as to speak thus of their mother, if he had not himself been frenzied by despair? And Jean still heard in his ears, still saw with his eyes, still felt in his nerves, in his inmost flesh, certain words, certain cries of suffering, some intonations and gestures of Pierre, that were so full of anguish as to be irresistible, as irrefutable as certainty.

He was too crushed to move or exert his will. His distress became intolerable; and he felt that behind the door was his mother, who had heard all and was waiting for him.

What was she doing? Not a movement, not a stir, not a breath, not a sigh, revealed the presence of a human being behind that door. Had she fled? But how? If she had fled, she must have leaped from the window into the street.

A start of terror seized him so sudden and so imperious that he burst open, rather than opened, the door, and rushed into his bedroom.

It seemed empty. A single candle on the dressing table lighted it.

Jean dashed to the window; it was fastened, and the shutters closed. He returned and scrutinized with anxious looks all the dark corners. He saw that the bed curtains were drawn; he ran and opened them. His mother was stretched on the couch, her face buried in the pillow, which she drew over her ears in order to hear no more.

At first he thought she was suffocated; then, taking her by the shoulders, he turned her round, without her ever letting go of the pillow which hid her face, and which she bit to keep from crying aloud.

But the touch of this stiffened body and of those arms clasping the pillow conveyed to him the shock of her unspeakable anguish. The energy and force with which she held, by hands and teeth, the feather pillow over her mouth, her ears, and her eyes, that he might not see her or speak to her, made him understand by sympathy to what point it is possible to suffer. His heart, his simple heart, was torn with pity. He was not a judge, not even a compassionate judge; he was a man full of weakness, and a son full of tenderness. He recalled nothing the other had said, he did not argue, he did not discuss; he simply touched with his two hands the inert body of his mother, and, as he could not pull the pillow from her face, he cried, as he kissed her dress:

"Mamma, mamma, my poor mamma! Look at me!"

She would have seemed lifeless, if an almost imperceptible shiver, a vibration as of a stretched cord, had not quivered through all her limbs. He repeated:

"Mamma, mamma, listen to me. It is not true. I am sure it is not true."

A spasm of suffocation was followed by sudden sobs in the pillow. Then all her nerves relaxed, the rigid muscles became pliant, the fingers unclasped and let go the pillow, and Jean raised it from her face.

She was very pale, very white, and tears were falling from her closed eyelids. Throwing his arms round her neck, he kissed her eyes with long, tender kisses that were moistened with her tears, and kept saying:

"Mamma, dear mamma, I am sure it is not true. Don't cry. I know it is not true."

She rose and sat up; she looked at him, and with one of those efforts of

courage which are required, in certain cases, in order to kill one's self, she said to him:

"No; it is true, my child!"

They remained in silence, face to face. For some moments she still seemed suffocating, stretching her neck, and throwing back her head to breathe. At length she mastered herself and resumed:

"It is true, my child. Why tell a lie? It is true. You would not believe me if I did lie."

She looked like a madwoman. Overcome with terror, he fell on his knees beside the bed.

"Oh, be still, mamma, be still!"

She rose up with appalling resolution and energy.

"I have nothing more to tell you, my child. Farewell!"

And she walked toward the door. He seized her with both arms, crying:

"What are you doing, mamma? Where are you going?"

"I do not know. How can I know? I have nothing more to do, for I am all alone."

She struggled to escape; and he, still holding her, could find only one word to say, over and over again:

"Mamma, mamma, mamma!"

In the midst of her efforts to break from his clasp, she said:

"No, no, I am no more your mother! I am nothing more to you, nor to any one, nothing more, nothing more! You have no longer father or mother, my poor child! Farewell!"

He understood now that if he let her go he would never see her again; so, lifting her in his arms, he carried her to an armchair, and forced her to sit there. Then, kneeling, and forming a chain around her with his arms, he said:

"You shall not leave here, mamma. I love you and will keep you with me. I will keep you always. You belong to me!"

In a low, weak voice she replied:

"No, my poor child, that is not possible. This evening you weep; to-morrow you would turn me out. You would not pardon me, either."

He answered with such an outburst of sincere love: "What, I? How little you know me!" that she gave a cry, took his head by the hair with both hands, pulled him toward her, and kissed his face wildly.

Then she remained motionless, her cheek against her son's cheek, feeling through his thick beard the warmth of his young life, and said, low in his ear:

"No, my little Jean. You would not pardon me to-morrow. You think so, and you are mistaken. You have pardoned me this evening, and that pardon has saved my life; but you must not see me again."

He repeated, clasping her tighter:

"Mamma, do not say that!"

"Yes, little one, I must go away. I do not know when, nor how I shall act, nor what I shall say. But it must be so. I would not dare to look at you or embrace you any more. Do you understand?"

Then in his turn he said, low in her ear:

"Darling mother, you will remain because I wish it, and have need of you. And you must swear to obey me, at once."

"No, my child."

"Oh, mamma, you must! Do you hear? You must!"

"No, my child, it is impossible. It

would condemn us all to hell. I know, I have known for a month, what that torture is. You are softened at this moment; but when it is past, when you look at me as Pierre does, when you recall what I have told you—— Oh, my little Jean—remember—remember that I am your mother!"

"You must not leave me, mamma. I have only you."

"But think, my son, we can never see each other again without blushing, both of us; without my feeling ready to die of shame, and without my eyes falling when you look at me."

"That is not true, mamma."

"Yes, yes, yes. It is true! Oh, I understand all the struggles of your poor brother, all of them, from the first day! Now, when I hear his step in the house, my heart leaps as if it would burst my breast; when I hear his voice, I feel as if I would faint. I had you still! You! Now I have you no longer. Oh, my little Jean, do you think I could live between you two?"

"Yes, mamma. I will love you so much that you will think of it no more."

"Oh, if that was possible!"

"It is possible!"

"How do you suppose I can forget it, with you and your brother here? Will neither of you think of it?"

"I will not, I swear!"

"You will think of it every hour of the day."

"No, I swear it. And then, listen, if you go away, I'll pick a quarrel and get myself killed."

She was distracted at the childish threat, and clasped Jean fondly, as she caressed him with passionate tenderness.

He continued:

"I love you more than you think, much more, much more. Come, be reasonable. Try to stay here only a week. Will you promise me a week? You cannot refuse me that!"

She laid her hands on Jean's shoulders, and holding him at arm's length:

"My child, let us be calm, and not be carried away by emotion. Let me speak to you, in the first place. If I should hear, once only, from your lips what I have heard for a month from your brother's mouth; if I were, once only, to read in your eyes what I read in his; if I were to surmise, by a mere word, a mere look, that I am as hateful to you as to him—one hour afterward, you understand, one hour afterward, I would leave forever."

"Mamma, I swear to you——"

"Let me speak. For a month I have suffered all that can be suffered. From the moment when I comprehended that your brother, my other son, suspected me, and that he was, minute by minute, coming nearer to the truth, every moment of my life has been a martyrdom impossible to describe."

Her voice was so full of anguish that it brought tears to the eyes of Jean.

He attempted to kiss her, but she repulsed him.

"Let me alone. Listen—I have so much to tell you, to make you understand. But you will not understand—that is, if I should stay—I should have to—— No, I cannot!"

"Speak, mamma, speak!"

"I will, then. At least, I will not have deceived you. You want me to stay with you, do you not? For me to stay, for us to be able to see each other still, to speak to each other, to meet each other all day in the house—for I dare not now open a door for fear

of finding your brother behind it—for all this, it is necessary not for you to pardon me—nothing hurts more than a pardon—but that you bear me no ill will for what I have done. You must feel yourself so strong, so different from all the world, as to say to yourself that you are not the son of Roland without blushing at the avowal and without despising me. I have suffered enough—I have suffered too much. I can bear no more. No, I can bear no more. And I have suffered, not just lately, but for a long while. You will never be able to understand. In order that we may still live together, still kiss each other, my little Jean, say to yourself, that, even though it was an unlawful union, I was even more his wife, his true wife; that I am not ashamed of it in my heart; that I regret nothing; I still love him, dead as he is; that I shall love him always, that I loved none but him; that he was all my life, all my joy, all my hope, all my consolation, all, all, all to me, ah, for so long! Listen, little one. Before God, who hears me, I would have had nothing good in life, if I had not met him—nothing; never affection, never kindness, never one of those hours that make us so regret that we grow old—nothing! I owe to him everything. I had only him in the world, and then you two, your brother and you. Without you it would have been void, black and void as night. I would have loved nothing, known nothing, desired nothing—I would not have even wept; for I have wept, my little Jean—yes, I have wept since we came here. I gladly gave myself to him, body and soul, forever; and for ten years I was his wife, as he was my husband before God, who made us for each other. And then I perceived that he loved me less. He was always good and thoughtful, but I was no longer to him what I had been. It was over. Oh, how I wept! What a wretched deceiver is life! Nothing lasts! And we came here, and I never saw him again; he never came here. He promised in all his letters—I always expected him—and I never saw him again—and now he is dead. But he still loved us, for he thought of you. As for me, I shall love him to my last breath, and will never deny him; and I love you because you are his child, and I could not be ashamed of him before you. Do you understand? I could not! If you wish me to stay, you must accept the fact that you are his son, and we must talk of him sometimes, and you must love him a little, and we must think of him when we look at each other. If you will not, if you cannot do this, farewell, my little Jean, it is impossible for us to remain together. I will do as you decide."

Jean replied, in a gentle voice:

"Stay, mamma."

She clasped him in her arms, and began to weep afresh; then, cheek pressed to cheek, she resumed:

"Yes, but Pierre, what can we do with him?"

Jean whispered:

"We will find something. You cannot live in the same house with him any longer."

The remembrance of her eldest son shook her with anguish.

"No, I cannot, I cannot."

And, flinging herself on Jean's breast, she cried in distress of soul:

"Save me from him, save me, little Jean. Do something. I do not know—find—save me!"

"Yes, mamma; I will see about it."

"At once—you must—at once—do not leave me! I am in fear of him—such fear!"

"Yes, I will find something, I promise you."

"But quickly, quickly! You do not know how I feel when I see him."

Then she whispered low in his ear: "Keep me here, at your rooms."

He hesitated, reflected, and with his positive good sense comprehended the danger of such an arrangement.

But he had to reason with her for a long time, and to discuss and combat with definite arguments her terror and distraction.

"Only this evening," she said. "Only to-night. You can tell Roland to-morrow that I did not feel well."

"That is not possible, as Pierre went home. Come, take courage. I will arrange everything, after to-morrow, I promise you. I will be at the house at nine o'clock. Come, put on your bonnet; I will take you home."

"I will do as you wish," she said, with childish resignation, in timid gratitude.

She attempted to rise, but the shock had been too great—she could not yet stand up.

He gave her some water to drink and some salts to smell, and bathed her temples with vinegar.

At length she was able to walk, and took his arm. Three o'clock was striking when they passed the town hall.

At the door of their dwelling he kissed her and said, "Adieu, mamma. Courage!"

With furtive steps she mounted the silent stairs, reached her room, undressed rapidly, and, with the revived emotions of other days, crept into the bed where Roland was snoring.

Pierre alone in the house was not asleep, and heard her return.

CHAPTER VIII

PIERRE'S RESOLUTION

On returning to his room, Jean flung himself on a couch; for the grief and anxiety which inspired in his brother a longing to run away, and fly like a hunted thing, had a different effect on his phlegmatic nature, and crippled his every limb. He felt himself weak beyond the power of movement, beyond the power of getting into bed; weak in body and soul, crushed and despairing. He was not, as Pierre was, stricken in the purity of his filial love, in that secret dignity in which proud spirits wrap themselves; he was overwhelmed by a stroke of fate, that at the same time menaced his dearest interests.

When at length his mind grew calm, when his thoughts had cleared themselves like troubled water, he faced the situation that had just been revealed to him. If he had learned the secret of his birth in any other manner, he would assuredly have been indignant and experienced deep grief; but after his quar-

rel with his brother, and after the violent and brutal revelation that shook his nerves, the poignant emotion of his mother's confession left him without energy to revolt. The shock received by his sensitive nature had been strong enough to sweep away, in irresistible commiseration, all the prejudices and all the sacred susceptibilities of natural morality.

Besides, he was not a man made to resist. He did not like to struggle against any one, still less against himself, and therefore he became resigned; and then, by an instinctive inclination, an innate love of repose and of a pleasant, tranquil life, he began to be disquieted about the annoyances which would arise about and around him, and affect him at the same time. He saw that they were inevitable; and, to remove them, he resolved on superhuman efforts of energy and activity. It was necessary that the difficulty should be met at once, the very next day; for he had at times that imperious need of immediate action that constitutes all the strength of the weak, who are incapable of a protracted power of will. His lawyer's turn of mind, trained, besides, to disentangle and study complicated situations and questions of domestic order in disturbed households, at once discovered all the immediate consequences of his brother's state of mind. In spite of himself, he faced the results from a professional point of view, as if he were arranging the future relations of clients after some moral catastrophe.

Beyond question constant contact with Pierre was becoming impossible. He could easily avoid him by remaining in his rooms, but it was impossible that their mother should continue to reside under the same roof as her elder son.

He meditated at length, as he lay motionless on the cushions, forming and rejecting plans, without finding anything to satisfy him.

Then suddenly this idea struck him: "Could an honorable man keep the fortune he had received?"

He was at first impelled to say, "No," and resolved to give it to some charity. It was hard, nevertheless. He would sell his furniture and work like any one else, as all have to work when beginning their career. This manly and painful determination roused his courage, and he rose and leaned his forehead against the window pane. He had been poor; he would be poor again. After all, it would not kill him. He looked at the gas lamp opposite, on the other side of the street. Then, as a belated woman passed by on the sidewalk, he suddenly thought of Madame Rosémilly, and felt a tightening at the heart. All the overwhelming consequences of his decision came to his mind. He would have to renounce his marriage with her, renounce happiness, renounce everything. Could he do this, now that he was engaged to her? She had accepted him with the knowledge that he was rich. If he were poor she would still accept him; but was he justified in asking her, in compelling her to this sacrifice? Would it not be better to keep this money as a trust, which he would later restore to the indigent?

In his soul, where egotism assumed the mask of probity, all these disguised interests struggled and fought. His first scruples gave way to ingenious arguments, then came again to the front and were once more removed.

He sat down again, seeking some deciding motive, some all-powerful pretext, to remove his uncertainty and convince his inborn integrity. A score of times already had he asked himself the question: "Since I am this man's son, since I know it and accept the situation, is it not natural to accept also his legacy?" This argument, however, could not stifle the "No" whispered by his deepest conscience.

Then he suddenly thought: "Since I am not the son of him whom I thought my father, I can accept nothing from him, neither in his life nor after his death. It would be neither noble nor just; it would be robbing my brother."

This new way of looking at it comforted him and quieted his conscience, and he went back to the window.

"Yes," he said to himself, "I must renounce the inheritance of my family. I must leave it whole and entire to Pierre, since I am not the son of his father. That is but just. Is it not just then, also, that I keep my own father's money?"

Recognizing the fact, then, that he could receive no benefit from Roland's fortune, having decided to relinquish it absolutely, he was willing and resigned himself to keep the fortune left by Maréchal; for, if he rejected both, he would find himself reduced to simple beggary.

This delicate affair being settled, he returned to the question of Pierre's presence in the family. How could he get rid of him? He was despairing of finding a practical solution, when the whistle of a steamer coming into port seemed to reply, by suggesting to him an idea.

With this thought he stretched himself upon his bed without undressing and dozed till daylight.

About nine o'clock he went out to see if he could carry out his project. After making some inquiries and a few calls, he betook himself to the house of his parents. His mother was waiting for him in her bedroom.

"If you had not come," she said, "I would never have dared to go down."

Roland was soon heard calling on the stairs:

"Nothing to eat to-day, eh? Confound it!"

There was no reply, so he roared:

"Josephine, confound it all! what are you about?"

The girl's voice came up from the depths of the basement:

"What is it, sir?"

"Where's your mistress?"

"She is upstairs with Monsieur Jean."

He raised his head toward the upper story, and shouted:

"Louise!"

Madame Roland half opened the door, and replied:

"Well?"

"Are we to have nothing to eat? Confound it!"

"We are coming, my dear."

She descended, and Jean followed.

Roland, when he saw the young man, cried:

"Ah, there you are! You are already tired of your lodgings?"

"No, father, but I wanted to chat with mamma this morning."

Jean advanced with outstretched hand, and when his fingers felt the paternal grasp of the old man, a strange, unforeseen emotion wrung his heart at the thought of a lasting separation and farewell.

Madame Roland inquired:

"Has not Pierre come?"

Her husband shrugged his shoulders.

"No, but never mind; he is always late. Let us begin without him."

She turned to Jean.

"You ought to go and look for him, my child. It hurts him when we do not wait for him."

The young man left the room. He mounted the stairs with the feverish resolution of a timid man who is going to fight a duel.

He knocked at the door. Pierre replied:

"Come in!"

He entered the room.

His brother was bending over the table and writing.

"Good-morning," said Jean.

Pierre rose.

"Good-morning."

And they shook hands as if nothing had happened.

"Are you not coming down to breakfast?"

"Well, the fact is, I have a great deal to do."

The voice of the older brother trembled, and his anxious eye asked the younger one what he was going to do.

"They are waiting for you."

"Oh, is—is our mother down there?"

"Yes. She herself sent me to look for you."

"Then I'll come down."

He hesitated at the dining-room door as to whether he should enter first. Then he opened it with a jerk, and saw his father and mother seated at table, opposite each other.

He went up to her without raising his eyes or pronouncing a word, and, bending toward her, offered her his forehead to kiss as he had done for some time past, instead of kissing her on the cheek as he did formerly. He guessed that her lips approached him, but he did not feel them on his forehead, and he straightened himself up with beating heart after this ghost of a kiss.

He asked himself: "What did they say after I left?"

Jean affectionately repeated the words "mother" and "dear mamma," and paid her great attention, handing her dishes and pouring out her wine. Pierre then understood that they had wept together, but he could not penetrate their thoughts. Did Jean believe his mother guilty, or his brother a scoundrel?

All the reproaches which he had heaped on himself for having uttered the horrible charge assailed him afresh, choking his throat, closing his mouth, and preventing him from eating or speaking.

He was overcome, at this moment, by an intolerable desire to flee, to leave this house which was no longer his, and these people who were bound to him now only by imperceptible bonds. He would have liked to go away at once, no matter where; for he felt that it was all over—that he could no longer remain among them, that he would torture them always, in spite of himself, by his mere presence, and that they would cause him intolerable suffering.

Jean was chatting with Roland, but Pierre was not listening, did not hear what they said. He fancied, however, that there was a meaning in his brother's tones, and he began to pay attention.

Jean said:

"It will be, it seems, the finest boat in their fleet. They say six thousand five

hundred tons. It will make its first voyage next month."

Roland exclaimed in surprise:

"So soon! I thought she would not be fit to go to sea this summer."

"You are mistaken. The work has been pushed so vigorously that the first trip will take place before the fall. I was at the company's office this morning, and spoke to one of the managers."

"Which of them?"

"Monsieur Marchand, a particular friend of the president of the board of directors."

"Why, do you know him?"

"Yes. And I had a slight favor to ask."

"Ah! Then you will take me over the *Lorraine* when she comes into harbor, won't you?"

"Certainly. Nothing easier."

Jean seemed to hesitate, pick his phrases, and change his subjects inexplicably. He continued:

"In brief, life on board these great Atlantic steamers is very pleasant. More than half of the month is spent ashore in two superb cities, New York and Havre, and the rest afloat with charming people. Very agreeable acquaintances can be made there, and very useful ones, too—very useful later on—among the passengers. Only imagine, the captain, if he is economical with his coal, can make twenty-five thousand francs a year, if not more."

"Phew!" exclaimed Roland, with a long whistle that bore witness to a profound respect for the sum and the captain.

Jean resumed:

"The purser may make ten thousand, and the doctor gets five thousand, fixed salary, with board, lodging, lights, heat, attendance, etc., etc. This is equal to ten thousand, at least. A good berth."

Pierre, who had raised his eyes, met those of his brother and understood him.

He asked, after a little hesitation:

"Is it difficult to obtain a place as doctor on one of these steamers?"

"Yes and no. It all depends on circumstances and influence."

There was a long silence, then the doctor spoke again:

"Is it next week that the *Lorraine* sails?"

"Yes; the seventh."

They were again silent.

Pierre was thinking. It would certainly be a solution of the difficulty if he could go as a doctor on this steamer. Later, he would see—he might leave, perhaps. Meanwhile, he would be earning his living without asking anything from his family. He had been forced, the night before, to sell his watch, for now he never asked his mother for money. This, then, was his last resort, his only means of a livelihood, except eating the bread of a home that he could no longer live in. So he said, hesitating a little:

"If I could manage it I should be very glad to sail on board of her."

"Why cannot you?" asked Jean.

"Because I know no one in the Transatlantic Company."

Roland, in astonishment, asked:

"And all your fine projects of success—what is to become of them?"

Pierre replied:

There are times when we must learn to sacrifice everything, and renounce our dearest hopes. Besides, this is only a beginning, a means of amassing a few thousand francs to get a start with."

The father was soon convinced.

"That's true. In two years you can lay aside six or seven thousand francs, which, if well invested, will be a great help. What do you think, Louise?"

"I think Pierre is right."

Roland exclaimed:

"I'll go and speak to Monsieur Poulin, whom I know very well. He is the judge of the Tribunal of Commerce, and is acquainted with the affairs of the company. I know also Monsieur Lenient, the shipbuilder, who is a great friend of one of the vice-presidents."

Jean asked his brother:

"Would you like me to sound Monsieur Marchand to-day?"

"Yes, I would."

Then, after reflecting for some instants, Pierre resumed:

"The best way would be, perhaps, to write to my teachers and professors in the medical college, who thought very highly of me. The doctors of these steamboats are often second class. Good, strong letters from Professors Mas-Roussel, Rémusot, Flache and Borriquel would be of more service to me than any number of doubtful recommendations. It would be only necessary to present these letters through your friend M. Marchand to the board of directors."

Jean expressed his approval.

"A very good idea, very good, indeed"; and he smiled as if reassured, almost happy, and sure of success, for he was incapable of tormenting himself long about anything.

"You will write to them to-day?" he said.

"At once, immediately. I'll go and do it. I won't take any coffee this morning, I am too nervous."

He rose and left the room.

Then Jean turned to his mother:

"Mamma, what are you going to do to-day?"

"Nothing. I do not know."

"Will you come with me to Madame Rosémilly's?"

"Why, yes—yes——"

"You know it is necessary that I should go there to-day."

"Yes—that is true."

"But why necessary?" asked M. Roland, who, as a rule, never understood what was being said.

"Because I promised to call there."

"That's all. That makes a difference."

And he began to fill his pipe, while the mother and son went upstairs to get their hats.

When they were in the street, Jean said:

"Will you take my arm, mamma?"

He was not in the habit of offering it to her, for they usually walked side by side. She took it and leaned on him.

For some time they did not speak, then he said:

"You see that Pierre is quite willing to go away."

She replied:

"Poor boy!"

"Poor boy—why so? He will not be so badly off at all when he is on the *Lorraine.*"

"No—I know—but I am thinking of so many things."

She kept on thinking, with her head bent, and keeping step with her son; and then, with that peculiar tone that our voice assumes sometimes when we utter the result of a long secret train of thought, she exclaimed:

"What a horrible thing life is! If by chance we find a moment of happiness

in it, it is a sin to enjoy it, and one has to pay very dear for it afterward."

He said in a low tone:

"Don't talk of it, mamma."

"How can I help talking of it? I am thinking of it all the time."

"You will forget."

She was silent once more, and then, with an expression of profound regret, she continued:

"Oh, how happy I could have been if I had married another man!"

At the present moment she was exasperated against Roland, and attributed to his homeliness, his stupidity, his awkwardness, his lack of intellect, to his vulgar appearance, all the responsibility for her mistake and her unhappiness. It was this, the vulgarity of the man, that caused her to be untrue to him, that made her drive one of her sons to despair, and that obliged her to make to the other the most painful confession that could be wrung from a mother's heart.

She continued:

"It is frightful for a young girl to marry a husband like mine."

Jean made no reply. He was thinking of the man whose son he had hitherto believed he was; and, perhaps, the confused notion which he had entertained, for some time, of that man's commonplace character, the persistent irony of his brother, the disdainful indifference of others, and even the contempt of the servant girl for Roland, had prepared his mind for the terrible avowal of his mother. He did not mind so much being the son of another man; and after the terrible shock of emotion of the day before, if he did not display the revolt, the indignation, and the anger which Madame Roland dreaded, the reason was that for a long time he had been unconsciously suffering from the feeling of being the child of this good-natured fool.

They were now in front of the house of Madame Rosémilly.

She lived on the road to Saint Adresse, on the second floor of a large house that belonged to her. The windows looked out on the whole roadstead of Havre.

When she saw Madame Roland, who was the first to enter, instead of extending her hand as usual, she opened her arms and embraced her, for she guessed the object of her visit.

The furniture of the room, in stamped velvet, was always covered with chintz; and on the walls, prepared in flower designs, were four engravings bought by her first husband, the captain. They represented marine and sentimental scenes. In the first, a fisherman's wife was waving a handkerchief on the shore, while the sails of a boat bearing away her husband disappeared on the horizon. In the second, the same woman, on her knees, on the same shore, was wringing her hands as she beheld in the distance her husband's boat foundering in an ocean of impossible waves, and beneath a sky in which the lightning flashed.

The two other engravings represented analogous scenes in a higher class of society.

A young fair-haired woman, leaning in a revery over the rail of a large mail steamer, just sailing away; she looks at the already distant shore with an eye wet with tears of regret.

Then the same young woman, seated near a window looking out on the ocean, has fainted in an armchair; a letter has just fallen from her lap to the carpet.

He is dead, then! What despair!

Visitors, generally, were very much touched by the commonplace melancholy of these evidently sentimental subjects.

The chairs were placed in regular order, some against the wall, some around the centre table. The white immaculate curtains had folds so straight and so regular that one would have liked to disarrange them a little; and never a single grain of dust tarnished the gilded clock in the style of the Empire, where a globe of the world on the back of a kneeling Atlas seemed to be ripening like a hothouse melon.

The two ladies, as they took their seats, slightly disarranged the normal position of the chairs.

"Have you been out to-day?" Madame Roland inquired.

"No. I confess I am rather tired."

And then, as if to thank Jean and his mother, she told how much she had enjoyed their excursion and the fishing party.

"Why," she said, "I ate my prawns this morning and they were delicious. If you like, we will repeat that excursion some other day."

The young man interrupted:

"Before commencing a second, had we not better finish the first?"

"How do you mean? It seems to me it is finished."

"Ah, madame, for my part, I landed a fish on the rocks of Saint Jouin, which I want to take home."

She assumed a sly, knowing look.

"You? What is it? What did you catch?"

"A woman! and we have come, mamma and myself, to ask if she has not changed her mind this morning."

She replied with a smile:

"No, monsieur; I never change my mind."

He extended to her his wide-open hand, and she placed hers in it with a decided, resolute gesture; then he asked:

"As soon as possible, eh?"

"Whenever you like."

"Six weeks?"

"It's all the same to me. What does my future mother-in-law think?"

Madame Roland replied, with a somewhat melancholy smile:

"As for me, I say nothing. I only thank you for loving Jean, for you will make him very happy."

"We will do what we can, mamma."

Somewhat touched for the first time, Madame Rosémilly arose, and, flinging both arms around Madame Roland, she gave her a long embrace as though she were a child; and under the pressure of this new caress a powerful emotion filled the aching heart of the poor woman. She could not say what her feelings were; they were at once sad and sweet; she had lost a son and was gaining a daughter.

When they had taken their seats again and were face to face, they took each other's hand and remained thus looking at each other, and smiling, while Jean seemed to be almost forgotten by them.

Then they talked of a number of things which had to be thought about for the approaching marriage, and when all was arranged and decided, Madame Rosémilly appeared suddenly to remember a trifling detail, and asked:

"You have consulted Monsieur Roland, I suppose?"

The same blush at once covered the cheeks of mother and son; it was the

mother who answered.

"Oh, no! what is the use of it?"

Then she hesitated, for she felt that some explanation was necessary, and continued:

"We do everything without saying anything to him about it. It is enough to tell him what we have decided."

Madame Rosémilly smiled; she was by no means surprised, for it seemed quite natural as the old gentleman was of little account.

When Madame Roland and her son were again in the street, the former said:

"Let us go to your rooms. I should like to rest a while."

She felt herself without shelter, without refuge, and with a horror of her home.

They entered Jean's apartments. As soon as she saw the door shut behind her, she gave a great sigh, as if the very turning of the lock had placed her in security; then, instead of resting herself, as she had intended, she began to open the wardrobes and count the piles of linen, the number of pocket-handkerchiefs and of stockings. She changed the usual order, seeking to arrange them in a manner more pleasing to her housewifely eye; and when she had disposed the linen, she drew back to contemplate her work, and said:

"Jean, come and see how pretty this is."

He rose and expressed his admiration for the purpose of gratifying her.

When he had resumed his seat, she suddenly stepped up lightly behind his armchair, and, throwing her right arm around his neck, she kissed him, while she placed on the mantelpiece a little package wrapped in white paper which she held in her other hand.

He asked:

"What is that?"

As she made no reply, he understood, for he recognized the shape of the frame.

"Give it to me," he said.

But she pretended not to hear him, and went back to the wardrobe. He rose and, eagerly seizing this melancholy relic, he crossed the room, and double-locked it in a drawer of his desk. His mother wiped away a tear that trembled on her eyelids, and said in a rather tremulous voice:

"Now I am going to see if your new servant keeps her kitchen in good order. As she is out just now, I can inspect everything."

CHAPTER IX

THE LAST FAREWELL

Letters of recommendation from Professors Mas-Roussel, Rémusot, Flache and Borriquel, which spoke in most flattering terms of their pupil, Dr. Pierre Roland, were submitted by M. Marchand to the Transatlantic Company, and indorsed by MM. Poulin of the Tribunal of Commerce, Lenient,

shipbuilder, and Marival, assessor to the mayor of Havre and a great friend of Captain Beausire.

It was ascertained that the surgeon of the *Lorraine* was not yet appointed, and Pierre had a chance of being nominated in a few days.

The notification of his appointment was handed him by the maid Josephine, one morning, as he was finishing his toilet.

His first emotion was that of a prisoner under sentence of death who receives a commutation of his sentence; and he at once felt his suffering assuaged somewhat by the thought of his departure, and of his calm life on board, rocked by the rolling waves, always roaming, always wandering.

He was now living in his father's house like a stranger, silent and reserved. Since the evening when he had allowed the shameful secret discovered by him to escape him in presence of his brother, he felt that he had broken the last ties that bound him to his kin. He was torn with remorse at having told it to Jean; he looked on himself as despicable, mean and malicious, and yet he felt some comfort in having spoken.

His eyes never met those of his mother or of his brother. The eyes of all of them had assumed, to avoid meeting each other, a surprising mobility, and artifices like those of enemies who fear to cross each other's path. He was always asking himself: "What can she have said to Jean? Did she confess or deny? What does my brother believe? What does he think of her? What does he think of me?" He could not imagine, and that exasperated him. Besides, he scarcely spoke to them, except in Roland's presence, so as to avoid questions.

When he received the letter notifying him of his appointment, he showed it at once to his family. His father, who was very readily pleased at everything, clapped his hand. Jean replied in a serious tone, but with a heart full of joy:

"I congratulate you heartily, for I know there were many applicants. You owe it to the letters from your professors."

His mother bent her head, and in a low tone said:

"I am very glad you have succeeded."

After dinner he went to the company's offices to obtain information about many matters, and asked the name of the surgeon of the *Picardie*, that was to sail the next day, in order that he might inquire about the details of his new life, and the special conditions that he would have to meet.

As Dr. Pirette was on board, he went to his room, a little steamer cabin, and was received by a young man with a light beard, who looked like his brother. They had a long conversation.

In the sonorous depths of the huge ship, a confused, ceaseless disturbance was going on in which the letting down of merchandise into the hold was blended with the sound of steps, with voices, with the movement of the derricks hoisting in the cargo, with the whistles of the boatswains, with the clang of chains dragging along the decks or wound on the capstan, with the hoarse puffing of the engine, which set up a slight vibration in the whole mass of the great vessel.

But when Pierre had quitted his colleague and found himself in the street, a new melancholy fell on him, and en-

veloped him, like those fogs that sweep across the sea, coming from the ends of the earth, and bearing in their impalpable density something mysterious and impure, like a pestilential breath from distant and unhealthy shores.

Never, in the hours of his greatest suffering, had he found himself plunged into such a quagmire of misery. The last tie had been broken; he no longer cared for anything. In tearing from his heart the roots of all his affections, he had not until now felt that distress as of a lost dog which suddenly seized him.

It was no longer a moral and torturing pang; it was the wild despair of a shelterless beast, the material anguish of a vagabond creature who no longer has a roof, and whom rain, wind, storm, all the brute forces of the world are about to attack. As he set his foot on the steamer and entered the little cabin tossing on the waves, the very flesh of the man, who had always slept in a quiet, motionless bed, revolted against the insecurity of all his future days. Hitherto, he had felt himself protected by solid walls set in earth, and by the certainty of always sleeping in the same place, beneath a roof that resisted the winds. Now, everything that can endure in the warmth of a solid house would be a danger and a perpetual suffering.

No ground beneath his feet; only the sea that heaves, and roars, and engulfs. No space around him, in which to walk, run, lose his way; only a few feet of plank to walk on like a criminal in the midst of other prisoners. No trees, gardens, streets, houses; nothing but water and sky. And then he would feel, unceasingly, the movement of the ship beneath his feet. In stormy weather he would have to lean against the partitions, or cling to the doors, or hang on to the edge of his narrow berth, to avoid falling. In calm weather he would hear the whirring noise of the screw, and feel the ship flying along, bearing him with it in its regular, exasperating flight.

He found himself condemned to this life of a wandering convict, solely because his mother had yielded to a moment's weakness.

He walked straight before him, overcome, for the moment, by the despairing melancholy of those who are going to expatriate themselves.

He no longer felt in his heart his haughty contempt or disdainful hate of unknown passers-by, but a sad longing to speak to them, to tell them that he was going to leave France, and to be listened to and consoled. In his bosom there was a need, like that of the shamefaced mendicant who holds out his hand—a timid yet strong need of feeling that some one was sorry for his departure.

He thought of Marowsko. The old Pole was the only one who loved him well enough to feel a true, deep emotion, and the doctor resolved to call on him at once.

When he entered the shop, the druggist, who was pounding some powders in the bottom of a marble mortar, gave a slight start and quitted his work.

"We never see you now," he said.

The young man explained that he had numerous affairs to look after, without betraying the reason, and took his seat, asking:

"Well, how is business?"

Business was not prosperous. Competition was terrible, sick folks scarce

and poor in that workingman's quarter. There was no sale except for cheap medicines, and the doctors did not prescribe those rare and complex remedies that give a profit of five hundred per cent. The old fellow concluded:

"If it lasts three months longer like this, I must shut up shop. If I had not you to depend on, my dear doctor, I would have turned bootblack before this."

Pierre felt his heart contract, and he decided to strike the blow abruptly, as it had to be done.

"Oh, on me? I can no longer be of any assistance to you. I leave Havre at the beginning of next month."

Marowsko took off his glasses, so great was his emotion, and cried:

"You—you! What's that you say?"

"I say I am going away, my poor friend."

The old man was stunned; he felt his last hope crumble; and he took a sudden dislike to this man, whom he had followed, and loved, and in whom he had had such confidence, and who deserted him in this way.

He stammered out:

"You are not going to betray me in your turn, are you?"

Pierre felt himself so moved that he longed to embrace him.

"I am not betraying you. I could not find a good place to establish a practice here, and I am going as a doctor on a transatlantic steamer."

"Oh, Monsieur Pierre, you promised faithfully to help me along in life!"

"What would you have? I must live myself; I have not a sou!"

Marowsko repeated:

"It is wrong, it is wrong—what you are going to do. Nothing now for me but to die of hunger. At my age, it is all over. It is wrong. You abandon a poor old man who came here to be near you. It is wrong."

Pierre wished to explain, give his reasons, and prove that he could not act otherwise. The Pole would not listen, in his indignation at such desertion, and ended by saying, with an allusion, beyond question, to certain political events:

"You Frenchmen never keep your word!"

Then Pierre rose, annoyed in turn, and, taking a higher tone, said:

"You are unjust, Monsieur Marowsko. It required powerful motives to make me adopt the decision I have made, and you ought to understand that. Good-day. I hope that next time I shall find you more reasonable."

He left the shop.

"Well," he thought, "no one will regret me sincerely."

He thought over carefully all the people he knew or had known; and, in the midst of all the faces that flitted across his memory, there stood out the face of the girl in the beer shop, who had caused him to suspect his mother.

He hesitated, for he nursed an instinctive grudge against her; then, by a sudden change of thought, "She was right, after all," he decided, and set out to find the street where she lived.

The beer shop was, as it happened, full of people and full of smoke. The customers—shopkeepers and workingmen, for it was a holiday—were shouting, laughing, calling for beer; and the landlord himself was serving them, running from table to table, carrying off the empty glasses, and bringing them back foaming.

When Pierre found a place, not far from the desk, he waited, hoping that the girl would see and recognize him.

She, however, passed and repassed in front of him, without a glance, trotting about with a little coquettish swing of her skirts.

At last he knocked on the table with a coin. She came up.

"What do you wish, sir?"

She did not look at him; her mind was lost in calculating the glasses that she had served.

"Is that the way to say 'Good-day' to one's friends?" he said.

She turned her eyes on him, and said hurriedly:

"Oh, it is you! You look well. But I have no time to-day. Do you want beer?"

"Yes, a 'bock.' "

When she brought it, he resumed:

"I came to say good-by; I am going away."

She replied with indifference:

"Oh, pshaw! Where are you going?"

"To America."

"They say it's a fine country."

Not a word more. He must indeed have been foolish to speak to her on such a day. There were too many people in the place.

Pierre walked toward the sea. When he reached the pier, he saw the *Pearl* coming in, with his father and Captain Beausire on board. The sailor, Papagris, was rowing, and the two others, sitting in the stern, smoked their pipes with an air of perfect happiness. As he saw them pass, he thought: "Blessed are the simple in spirit."

He seated himself on one of the benches of the breakwater, to try and benumb himself into an animal-like somnolence.

When he returned home in the evening, his mother, without daring to raise her eyes to him, said:

"You will need to get a great many things before you start, and I am rather perplexed. I ordered your body linen, and have seen the tailor about your clothes; but is there nothing else you need, things I do not know about, perhaps?"

He opened his lips to say "No, nothing," but he reflected that he must, at least, accept enough to dress himself decently, and replied, in a very calm tone:

"I do not know yet myself. I will ask at the office."

He obtained there a list of indispensable articles. His mother, on receiving it from his hands, looked at him, for the first time in a long while, and her eyes had the humble, soft, sad, appealing expression of a poor dog that has been whipped and is begging pardon.

On the first of October, the *Lorraine*, sailing from Saint Nazaire, entered the port of Havre, to sail on the seventh of the same month for her destination of New York. Pierre Roland had to take possession of the little floating cabin in which henceforth his life would be imprisoned.

The following day as he was going out he met his mother on the stairs; she was waiting for him, and said in an almost unintelligible voice:

"Do you not want me to help you in arranging your room on the boat?"

"No, thanks; everything is done."

"I want so much to see your cabin," she murmured.

"It is not worth the trouble. It is

very ugly and very small."

He went on, leaving her stunned, leaning against the wall, with her face deathly pale.

Now, Roland, who had visited the *Lorraine* that very same day, talked during dinner of nothing but that magnificent ship, and was much astonished that his wife had no desire to see it, since their son was to sail in it.

Pierre was scarcely at home at all for the next few days. He was nervous, irritable, harsh, and his brutal remarks seemed to hit every one. But on the evening before his departure he suddenly appeared very much changed and softened. As he was embracing his parents before going to sleep on board for the first time, he said:

"You will come and say 'Good-by' to me to-morrow, at the ship?"

Roland cried:

"Yes, yes, by Jove! Won't we, Louise?"

"Certainly," she said, in a low voice.

Pierre continued:

"We leave at eleven, sharp. You must be down there at half-past nine, at the latest."

"Hello!" cried the father; "here's an idea. When we leave you, we will run as fast as we can and go aboard the *Pearl,* and wait for you outside the harbor, and get another sight of you. Shall we do that, Louise?"

"Yes, certainly."

Roland went on:

"In this way you will not lose sight of us in the crowd that covers the pier when the transatlantic liners sail. One can never find one's friends in the throng. Does that suit you?"

"Oh, yes. Let us arrange it so."

An hour later Pierre was stretched on his little sailor's bed, long and narrow as a coffin. He lay a long time with his eyes open, thinking of all that had passed during the last two months in his life, and, above all, in his soul. Through having suffered and made others suffer, his aggressive and vengeful grief had worn itself out, like a foaming wave. He had scarcely the courage to be angry with any one, for any cause whatever; he let his indignation drift, like his life. He felt so weary of struggling, weary of smiting, weary of hating, weary of everything, that he could bear it no longer, and he sought to numb his heart into forgetfulness, as when one falls asleep. He heard, vaguely, around him the strange sounds of the ship—slight sounds, scarcely perceptible in that calm night in the harbor—and in the wound in his heart hitherto so agonizing he felt only a painful tingling as of a scar that was healing.

He slept profoundly till he was awakened by the movements of the sailors. It was daylight, and the tidal train with the passengers from Paris arrived at the quay.

Then he wandered about the ship, among the busy, restless crowd of people looking for their cabins, calling to each other, questioning and answering one another, in all the bewilderment of the beginning of a voyage. After a salute to the captain, and a shake of the hand to his comrade the purser, he entered the cabin, where some Englishmen were already dozing in the corners. The large room, with its walls of white marble with gold borders, appeared still larger as it was reflected with its long tables flanked by two unlimited lines of revolving chairs cov-

ered with crimson velvet. This, then, was the vast floating cosmopolitan hall, where the rich people of every continent had to dine in common. Its opulent luxury was that of large hotels, theatres, public places—a luxury that was commonplace and self-asserting, which satisfied the eyes of millionaires. The doctor was about to enter the second cabin, when he remembered that on the previous evening a great horde of emigrants had embarked; so he went to the lower deck. When he entered there, he was struck by a nauseating stench of poor dirty humanity; the odor of human flesh, more sickening than that of the hair or wool of beasts. There, in a sort of low, dark tunnel, like the galleries in mines, he saw hundreds of men, women and children stretched on planks, tier above tier, or grovelling in heaps on the floor. He could not distinguish faces, but he dimly saw this filthy crowd in rags, this crowd of wretched men conquered by life, exhausted, crushed down—starting with an emaciated wife and half-starved children, for an unknown country, where they hoped not to die of hunger, perhaps.

As he thought of the past toil, the wasted toil, the barren efforts, the bitter strife renewed each day in vain, the energy spent by these beggars who were going to begin again, they did not know where, this existence of horrible wretchedness, the doctor felt a desire to cry out to them, "Dump yourselves into the sea, with your women and your little ones!" and his heart was so wrung by pity that he walked away, unable to bear the sight.

His father, his mother, his brother, and Madame Rosémilly were already waiting for him in his cabin.

"So soon?" he said.

"Yes," replied Madame Roland, with a trembling voice; "we wished to have time to see you a little."

He looked at her. She was in black as if in mourning, and he suddenly perceived that her hair, that was merely gray the month before, had now become quite white.

He could with difficulty seat the four visitors in his little cabin, and he himself got up on his bunk. Through the open door they saw a crowd as numerous as that in the streets on a holiday; for all the friends of the passengers, and an army of mere sightseers, had invaded the huge liner. They walked along the corridors, through the saloons, everywhere, and some heads were poked into the room, while voices outside muttered, "That's the doctor's room."

Then Pierre closed the door; but when he found himself shut up with his friends he longed to open it again, for the movement on the ship concealed their constraint and their silence.

At length Madame Rosémilly determined to speak.

"Very little air comes through these small windows."

"It is a port hole," said Pierre.

He pointed out the thickness of the glass that rendered it capable of resisting the most violent shocks, and then he explained at length the method of closing it. Roland next asked:

"Do you keep your medicines here?"

The doctor opened a locker, and showed them a row of phials that bore white labels with Latin names.

He took one down and enumerated the properties of its contents; then a second, then a third, and delivered a

lecture on therapeutics which seemed to be listened to with great attention.

Roland shook his head, repeating:

"Is it not interesting?"

A gentle knock at the door was heard.

"Come in," cried Pierre.

And Captain Beausire appeared.

He said, as he held out his hand:

"I am late in coming, because I did not want to disturb the family leave-taking."

He, too, had to sit on the bunk. Then the silence recommenced.

Suddenly, however, Captain Beausire pricked up his ears. Some order had reached him through the partition, and he remarked:

"It is time for us to go if we want to get on board the *Pearl* and see you again as you come out, and say 'Good-by' in the open sea."

Roland made a great point of doing this, doubtless with a view to impress the passengers on the *Lorraine,* and rose hurriedly.

"Come, good-by, my boy."

He kissed Pierre's whiskers, and then opened the door.

Madame Roland did not stir, and remained with downcast eyes and very pale face.

Her husband touched her on the arm.

"Come, let us be off. We have not a moment to lose."

She stood up, took a step toward her son, and held out to him, one after the other, two cheeks as white as wax, which he kissed without saying a word. Then he shook Madame Rosémilly's hand and his brother's, asking him:

"When is the wedding to be?"

"I do not yet know precisely. We will make it fit in with one of your voyages."

Finally they all left the room, and went up to the deck, which was encumbered with the public and porters and sailors.

The steam was roaring in the enormous belly of the ship, which seemed to tremble with impatience.

"Good-by," said Roland hurriedly.

"Good-by," replied Pierre, standing at the top of one of the little wooden gangways leading from the *Lorraine* to the quay.

He again shook all their hands, and his family departed.

"Quick, quick, into the carriage!" cried old Roland.

A cab was waiting for them, and took them to the outer harbor, where Papagris had the *Pearl* all ready to put off.

There was not a breath of air; it was one of those calm, dry days of autumn, when the smooth sea seems cold and hard as steel.

Jean seized an oar, the sailor flung the other into the rowlocks, and they began to row. On the breakwaters, the piers, even on the granite breastworks, there was an innumerable crowd, jostling and noisy, waiting for the *Lorraine* to pass by.

The *Pearl* rowed out between these two billows of humanity, and was soon outside the dock.

Captain Beausire, seated between the two ladies, held the tiller, and said:

"You will see that we shall be directly in her course, down there."

The two rowers pulled with all their might to get out as far as possible. All at once Roland exclaimed:

"Here she is! I see her rigging and her two smokestacks. She is coming out

of the basin."

"Pull, boys," repeated Beausire.

Madame Roland took her handkerchief from her pocket and held it to her eyes.

Roland was standing up and clinging to the mast.

"Now she is swinging into the outer harbor. She does not stir. She is in motion again. She has to take a tug. She is off! Hurrah! She is between the jetties. Don't you hear the people cheering her? It is the *Neptune* that is towing her—I see her bows just now. There she is—there she is! *Mon Dieu,* what a ship! Just look at her!"

Madame Rosémilly and Beausire turned round; the two men ceased to row; Madame Roland alone was motionless.

The huge vessel, towed by a powerful tugboat, which looked like a caterpillar before her, came slowly and royally out of the harbor. The good folk of Havre, massed on the piers, the beach, and at their windows, suddenly carried away with patriotic zeal, shouted, *"Vive la Lorraine!"* cheering and applauding her stately departure—this child of a great maritime city that gave to the sea her fairest daughter.

But as soon as she had cleared the narrow passage between the two granite walls, and at length found herself free, she cast off her tug, and started alone, like some huge monster racing across the water.

"Here she comes! Here she comes!" Roland kept crying. "She is coming straight toward us."

Beausire, radiant with delight, repeated:

"Did not I tell you so? Eh? Don't I know their course?"

Jean, in a low voice, whispered to his mother:

"Mamma, look—she is coming."

Madame Roland uncovered her eyes, that were blinded with her tears.

On came the *Lorraine,* at full speed after clearing the harbor, with the clear, calm, fine weather. Beausire, with his glass levelled, cried:

"Attention! Monsieur Pierre is at the stern, all alone, well in sight. Attention!"

The *Lorraine,* high as a mountain, swift as a train, passed the *Pearl* almost within touching distance. Madame Roland, distracted and heartbroken, stretched out her arms toward the ship, and saw her son, her son Pierre, with his gold-laced cap, fling to her with both hands his farewell kisses.

But he went away in the distance, gradually vanishing and disappearing, until he was an imperceptible speck on the gigantic vessel. She tried to distinguish him still, and could not recognize him.

Jean took her hand.

"You saw him?" he said.

"Yes, I saw him. How good he is!"

They headed their boat toward the town.

"By Jove, she goes fast!" M. Roland declared with enthusiastic conviction.

The steamer, indeed, diminished moment by moment, as if it had melted away into the ocean. Madame Roland saw it plunge into the horizon toward an unknown country at the other end of the world. On that ship which nothing could stop, on that ship which soon she would no longer see, was her son, her poor boy. And it seemed to her that half of her heart went with him; it seemed to her, also, as if her life

was ended; it seemed to her that never more would she behold her child.

"Why are you crying?" asked her husband. "He will be back in less than a month."

She sobbed:

"I do not know. I cry because I am not well."

When they returned to land, Beausire left them at once to go and breakfast with a friend. Jean went on in front with Madame Rosémilly, and Roland said to his wife:

"He has a good figure, all the same, our Jean."

"Yes," replied the mother.

And, as she was too troubled in mind to think of what she was saying, she added:

"I am very glad he is going to marry Madame Rosémilly."

M. Roland was stupefied.

"Oh, pshaw! What? He is going to marry Madame Rosémilly?"

"Yes. We counted on asking your opinion this very day."

"Well, well! Is it long since this affair has been on hand?"

"No; only a few days. Jean wished to be sure of being accepted by her before consulting you."

Roland rubbed his hands.

"Excellent, excellent. Nothing could be better. I approve of it decidedly."

As they were about quitting the quay and taking the Boulevard François I, his wife turned once more to cast a last look at the open sea; but she saw nothing but a little gray trail of smoke, so distant, so slight, that it had the appearance of a wreath of mist.

THE END

VOLUME V

MONT ORIOL

MONT ORIOL

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE MINERAL SPRINGS

FRESH from the baths, the early risers walked slowly, two by two or alone, under the great trees beside the brook that flows through the gorge of Enval.

Others coming from the village entered the building with a hurried air. It was a large structure, with the ground-floor reserved for hot baths; the upper floor for a casino, café and billiard hall.

After Dr. Bonnefille's discovery in the depths of Enval of the great spring christened by him "Bonnefille," some land owners in the vicinity had decided to erect the building and make the place a health and pleasure resort. It lay in the midst of a superb valley of Auvergne, wild yet bright, and shaded by giant walnut and chestnut trees. Mineral water, shower and other baths were furnished on the first story, and above, beer, wines and music. Part of the ravine along the brook had been enclosed as a park in which three paths were laid out, one nearly straight, the others winding. At the end of the first played a little fountain fed from the main spring, which bubbled up in a large cement basin sheltered by a straw roof, and was presided over by an impassive woman whom everyone called Marie. This placid woman of Auvergne, wearing a little cap always snowy white and nearly covered by a large apron always very clean, that hid her working dress, slowly rose when she saw a bather coming towards her. As soon as she recognized him, she picked out his glass from a little movable, glazed cupboard, and calmly filled it with a zinc dipper.

The gloomy bather smiled, drank and returned the glass with, "Thanks, Marie!" then turned away. And Marie seated herself again on her chair to wait on the next comer.

Indeed, there were not many.

The resort at Enval had been open for invalids for only six years, and had but few more patients now than at first. About fifty came, attracted chiefly by the beauty of the country and the charm of the little village, amid the shadow of gigantic trees, whose gnarled trunks seemed as large as the houses. Besides this they were drawn there by the fame of the gorges at the end of the weird valley, which opens on the great plain of Auvergne and ends abruptly, at the foot of a high mountain studded with ancient craters, in a wild rift filled with fallen and overhanging rocks. Here a brook cascades over giant boulders, forming

at the foot of each a miniature lake.

This hot-springs resort had begun as they all do—through a circular by Dr. Bonnefille describing the spring. He began by praising the Alpine charms of the country in a stately and grandiloquent style, using only choice adjectives which give effect and tell nothing. All the surroundings were picturesque, with majestic views of landscapes of familiar loveliness. All the near-by walks were remarkable for their original charms, which would captivate the fancy of artists and tourists. Then suddenly, with no transition, he descanted on the therapeutic properties of the Bonnefille spring, which contained a combination of soda, lithia, carbonates, iron, etc., and with power to heal all diseases, which latter he enumerated under the title: "Chronic or acute diseases specially calling for the Enval treatment," and this list was long and varied, consolatory to all classes of invalids. The circular ended with useful practical information, price of lodgings, cost of living and of hotels. For three hotels had sprung up at the same time as the medical casino. They were the Grand Hotel, quite new, built on the side of the valley facing the baths; the Hot Springs Hotel, an old inn refurnished, and the Vidaillet Hotel, made simply by purchasing three neighboring houses and throwing them into one.

Then two doctors were found settled in the place the very same morning, without anyone's knowing just how they had come, for doctors at watering places seem to rise from the springs like bubbles of gas. They were Dr. Honorat of Auvergne and Dr. Latonne of Paris. A fierce hatred at once arose between Dr. Latonne and Dr. Bonnefille; but Dr. Honorat, a large, clean, smooth-shaven man, smiling and easy going, gave his right hand to the first, his left to the second, and stayed on good terms with both. Dr. Bonnefille, however, was master of the situation by virtue of his title of inspector of the waters and of the hot-springs casino of Enval-les-Bains.

This title was his power, and the casino was his life-work. There he passed his days, even his nights, it was said. A hundred times a morning he went from his house near by in the village to his office on the right side of the entrance of the lobby. Ambushed there, like a spider in its web, he watched the comings and goings of the patients, looking at his own with a stern eye and at those of the others with an angry mien. He challenged everybody, almost like a captain at sea, and terrified new comers—unless he made them smile.

Just as he was arriving that day at such a rapid pace that the long tails of his old frock coat fluttered like wings, he was stopped short by a voice calling "Doctor!"

He turned. His thin face furrowed with deep, ill-natured wrinkles, seeming black in their hollows, marred by a grizzly beard rarely trimmed, essayed to smile. He raised the silk hat, shabby, spotted, greasy, with which he covered his long pepper-and-salt shock of hair —"pepper and soiled," said his rival, Dr. Latonne. Then he stepped forward and bowing, murmured:

"Good-morning, marquis; are you feeling well this morning?"

The Marquis of Ravenel, a little, well-groomed man, held out his hand to the doctor and answered:

"Very well, doctor, very well, or rather, not badly. I suffer constantly with my back, but after all I am better, much better, although I am only at my tenth bath. Last year I felt no relief until the sixteenth, do you remember?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"But it is not about that that I want to speak to you. My daughter arrived this morning and I would like to consult you first on the subject because my son-in-law, M. Andermatt, William Andermatt, the banker——"

"Yes, I know."

"My son-in-law has a letter of introduction to Dr. Latonne. But I have confidence only in you, and I hope you will be so good as to go up to the hotel before—you understand—I would rather speak frankly—are you at liberty now?"

Dr. Bonnefille, much agitated and very uneasy, replaced his hat. He replied at once:

"Yes, I am at leisure. Would you like me to go with you?"

"If you please."

Leaving the casino behind them, they walked rapidly up the graded path leading to the Grand Hotel, which was built on the slope of the mountain so that the guests might enjoy the view.

On the second story they entered the private sitting-room of the Ravenel and Andermatt families, and the marquis left the doctor a moment alone, while he went to find his daughter.

He returned with her almost at once. She was a blonde young woman, petite, pale, very pretty, with features like a child's, while her daring blue eyes threw resolute glances that gave a charming air of firmness and a striking character to this tiny, dainty lady. She had no serious illness, only ill-defined symptoms—melancholy, fits of causeless crying, irritability—in short, anæmia. She wished above all things for a child, which she had vainly hoped for during the three years she had been married.

Dr. Bonnefille assured them that the springs of Enval were sovereign remedies. He at once wrote down his prescriptions, which always had as imposing an air as a public prosecutor's address to the court.

These prescriptions spread over many paragraphs of several lines each, on a large, white sheet of foolscap paper, and were crazily written in characters like bristling sword-points. Then the draughts, the pills, the powders that one should take fasting morning, noon, and night followed one another in fierce array.

One expected to read: "Whereas: Monsieur X. is overtaken by an incurable and fatal chronic disease.

"He must take: 1st. Sulphate of quinine, to cause deafness and loss of memory.

"2d. Bromide of potassium, to destroy his stomach, weaken his faculties, cause a rash, and fetid breath.

"3d. Iodide of potassium which, desiccating all the glands of his body and brain, will leave him in a short time as helpless as an imbecile.

"4th. Salicylate of soda, of uncertain curative powers, but which seems to lead patients to a terrible and sudden death.

"And in connection with these:

"Chloral that causes madness, belladonna which affects the eyes, all the plant and mineral drugs which corrupt the blood, corrode the organs, gnaw the

bones, and cause death to all those whom disease itself has spared."

He wrote a long time on both sides of the sheet and then signed it like a magistrate signing a death sentence.

The young woman sitting opposite watched him with a smile curving the corners of her lips.

The moment he left the room after a grand bow she caught up the ink-blackened paper, rolled it into a ball, tossed it into the fireplace, and, laughing merrily, said: "Oh, father, where did you discover this old fossil? Why, he looks exactly like an old-clothes man! Oh! how good you are to unearth this doctor of the days before the Revolution. Oh, how droll he is! —and dirty—yes, indeed, dirty! I truly believe that he has soiled my penholder."

The door opened, and M. Andermatt was heard calling: "Walk in, doctor." And Dr. Latonne entered. Erect, slender, elegant, rather young, wearing a well-made coat, and carrying a silk hat, the distinguishing mark of the practicing doctor at the hot springs of Auvergne, the smooth-shaven Parisian doctor looked like an actor visiting the country.

The marquis, much confused, did not know what to say or do. To hide her laughter, his daughter pretended to cough. The visitor bowed with an air of assurance and took a seat at the young lady's invitation. M. Andermatt followed him into the room and at once entered into a long description of his wife's symptoms, the opinions of the doctors consulted in Paris, and his own, based on special reasons and expressed in technical terms.

He was still very young, a Jew, and a typical business man. He carried on a varied business and grasped every detail with a versatility, rapidity of penetration, and accuracy of judgment that were simply marvelous. Short and stout, bald, with a round baby face and fat hands, he looked too florid for health. He talked with astonishing fluency.

To extend his business relations in higher circles of society he had shrewdly married the daughter of the Marquis of Ravenel. Besides, the marquis had about thirty thousand francs of income and only two children. Andermatt, however, when he married at hardly thirty years of age had already five or six millions, and had investments from which he would realize ten or twelve. M. de Ravenel, a vacillating and weak man, first angrily repelled the overtures of marriage, indignant at the thought of his daughter's marrying a Jew. Then, after six months of opposition, he yielded under the pressure of wealth, on condition that the children should be brought up in the Catholic faith.

As yet, however, there were none. Then the marquis, who was very enthusiastic for the past two years over the Enval springs, remembered that the circular of Dr. Bonnefille held out hopes to those that were childless.

So he sent at once for his daughter and her husband, accompanied her to confide her, on the advice of their Paris physician, to the care of Dr. Latonne. Andermatt went to call on the doctor as soon as he arrived, and described to him at length his wife's symptoms. He ended by saying how disappointed he was to have no children.

Dr. Latonne allowed him to finish, then, turning to the young woman, said:

"Is there anything you would like to add, madam?"

She replied, gravely:

"No, nothing."

He resumed:

"Then may I ask you to change your dress for a simple white wrapper?"

As she was surprised, he briefly explained his method:

"Mon Dieu, madam, it is very simple! The old physicians thought that all diseases were caused by some taint in the blood or some chronic organic trouble. We now think that often, especially in such cases as yours, the vague symptoms from which you suffer and even very grave or fatal troubles may arise simply from the fact that some organ attains, from reasons which are difficult to determine, an abnormal development to the detriment of its neighbors, thus destroying all the harmony and balance of the human body. Physiological functions are modified or arrested and the play of all the other organs is impeded.

"Thus a mere distention of the stomach may result in symptoms which would lead one to think there was heart trouble, for the action of the heart is obstructed and becomes irregular or intermittent. Enlargements of the liver or of certain glands may cause the patient to fall into a decline which doctors who are not observing may attribute to a thousand strange causes.

"For this reason, first, we determine whether all a patient's organs are normal in size and position, for a trifling deviation will upset a person's health. So, with your permission, madam, I will carefully examine you and chalk down on your wrapper the sizes and positions of your organs."

He had placed his hat on a chair and spoke in an easy manner. His large mouth, as it opened and closed, formed two deep furrows in his shaven cheeks which gave him quite an ecclesiastical air.

Andermatt, perfectly delighted, exclaimed: "Well, well, that's fine, very ingenious, very new, very modern."

"Very modern," from his lips, expressed the highest admiration.

The young woman, much amused, rose, retired to her room and soon reappeared in a white wrapper.

The doctor placed her on a sofa, then drawing from his pocket a red, blue, and black colored pencil, he began to diagnose by auscultation and percussion, covering his patient's wrapper with little colored lines to record each observation.

After a quarter of an hour of this work she looked like a geographical map with the continents, seas, capes, rivers, countries, and cities, with the names of the political divisions, for the doctor wrote on each boundary two or three Latin words understood only by himself.

When he had finished, he drew from his pocket a red leather notebook tied with gold strings and arranged alphabetically. He turned to a page and wrote: "Examination No. 6,347.—Mme. Andermatt—age 21."

Then he studied his diagram in colors sketched on the wrapper, like an Egyptologist deciphering hieroglyphics, and entered it in his notebook.

He gave his opinion when this was done: "Nothing alarming, nothing abnormal except a slight, very slight deviation that thirty acidulated baths will cure. In addition you should take every

morning before noon three small glasses of water. Nothing more. I will call again to see you in four or five days." And rising, he bowed and withdrew so suddenly that everyone was amazed. He cultivated this abrupt way of leaving as his particular style. For he thought it extremely good form, and that it made a great impression on the patients.

Madame Andermatt ran to look at herself in the mirror, and shook with the merry laughter of a happy child as she said:

"Oh, how funny they are, how droll! Tell me, is there another? I want to see him right away. Will, do go and find him for me. There should be a third. I want to see him."

Her husband asked in surprise:

"What do you mean by a third—a third what?"

The marquis had to explain, with many excuses, for he was a little afraid of his son-in-law. He told how Dr. Bonnefille had come to call on him and that he had then consulted the doctor in regard to Christiane, for he had great confidence in the experience of the old man, who was a native of the place, and had discovered the spring.

Andermatt shrugged his shoulders and declared that Dr. Latonne only should take care of his wife. So the marquis began to think very anxiously how he could arrange matters so as not to offend his irascible doctor.

In the meantime Christiane asked, "Is Gontran here?" He was her brother.

Her father replied:

"Yes, he came four days ago with one of his friends of whom he has often spoken to us, M. Paul Brétigny. They are making a tour of Auvergne together, and arrived here from Mount Doré and the Bourboule and leave for Cantal at the close of next week."

Then he asked his daughter if she would like to rest until luncheon, after the night on the train; but she had slept very well in the sleeping-car, and asked only for an hour in which to dress. Then she would like to visit the village and the casino.

Her father and her husband went to their rooms to wait until she was ready.

She soon sent for them and they all went off together. At first she was all enthusiasm over the village built in the forest and the deep valley which seemed shut in on all sides by chestnut trees as high as hills. One saw these everywhere, left to their chance growth of four centuries, in front of the doors, in the courts, in the streets. Then everywhere around were fountains made of a large black stone standing on end and pierced with a small hole, from which gushed a thread of clear water that fell into a watering trough. A fresh smell of cow stables was perceived amid all this verdure. Walking soberly in the streets or standing in front of their houses one saw the women of Auvergne spinning with deft fingers black wool on a distaff, the end of which was secured in their belt. Their short skirts revealed thin ankles covered with blue stockings, and their waists, held at the shoulders by a sort of bretelles, showed the linen sleeves of their chemises, from which projected their hard, leathery arms and bony hands.

But suddenly strange music burst on the ears of the strollers. One would have said a wheezy barrel organ—a barrel organ all used up, broken-winded, good for nothing.

Christiane exclaimed:

"What on earth is that?"

Her father laughingly replied:

"It is the orchestra of the casino. It takes four to make that noise."

And he led her to a red placard, pasted on the corner of a farm house, which bore in black letters the legend:

CASINO D'ENVAL

Under the direction of M. Petrus Martel of the Odéon.

Saturday, July 6th.—Grand concert arranged by the maëstro Saint-Landri, who received the second grand prize of the Conservatory. Pianist, M. Javel, first laureate of the Conservatory.

Flutist.—M. Noirot, laureate of the Conservatory.

Double-bass.—M. Nicordi, laureate of the Royal Academy of Brussels.

After the concert, a grand performance will be given of:

LOST IN THE FOREST

Comedy in one act
By M. Pointillet

CHARACTERS

Pierre de Lapointe .....
MM. Petrus Martel, of the Odéon
Oscar Leveille .....
Petitnivelle, of the Vaudeville
Jean .....
Lapalme, of the Grand Theater of Bordeaux
Philippine .....
Mlle. Odelin, of the Odéon

During the performance the orchestra will also be conducted by the maëstro Saint-Landri.

Christiane read this aloud, laughed, and wondered what it would be like.

Her father resumed:

"Oh, they will amuse you! Come, let us go and see them."

They turned to the right and entered the park. The bathers were walking solemnly, slowly, on the three paths, drinking their glass of water, then leaving. Some sitting on the benches traced lines in the sand with the ends of their canes or umbrellas. They did not talk at all, seemed not to think at all, and scarcely alive, were benumbed, paralyzed by the *ennui* of the hot-springs resorts. Only the bizarre sound of the orchestra, jangling through the calm, sweet air of the dense foliage, coming one knew not whence, made one knew not how, seemed to give motion to these sad walkers.

A voice called "Christiane!" She turned and found it was her brother. He ran up and embraced her and shook hands with Andermatt. Then he took his sister's arm and led her on, leaving his father and his brother-in-law behind.

The brother and sister chatted. He was a fine-looking fellow, elegant, merry like herself, changeable like the marquis, careless, but always with an eye to the almighty dollar.

"I thought you were sleeping," he said, "or I would have called to greet you. Then, too, Paul took me off this morning to the Château of Tournoël."

"Who is Paul? Oh, yes, your friend."

"Paul Brétigny. That's true, you do not know him. He is taking a bath just now."

"He is ill?"

"No, but he is undergoing a cure

all the same. He has lately been in love."

"And he takes carbonated baths—they say carbonated, don't they—to recover himself?"

"Yes, he does everything I tell him to do. Oh, he was hard hit! He is a violent, terrible fellow. He came near dying. He wanted to kill her, too. She was an actress—a well-known actress. He loved her madly. Then she was clearly unfaithful to him. It was a frightful tragedy. So I took him away. He is better now, but he still thinks of her."

She had been smiling a moment before, now, grown suddenly serious, she answered:

"It would interest me to meet him."

To her, indeed, "Love" did not mean much. She sometimes thought of it, as one dreams, when one is poor, of a necklace of pearls, of a diamond tiara, with a wakening desire for this possible yet remote object. She pictured it to herself from some novels she had read, for lack of anything else to do, and did not look upon it as a matter of much moment. She was not given to dreaming, for she had been born with a happy disposition, quiet and satisfied. Although she had been married two and a half years, she had not yet wakened from that sleep in which artless young girls live—that sleep of the heart, of the mind, and of the senses which in some women continues to the day of their death. Life seemed to her simple and good with no complications, for she never sought the why or the wherefore. She lived, slept, dressed with taste, smiled, and was content. What more could be asked of her?

When Andermatt was suggested as her betrothed, she first refused with childish rage to be the wife of a Jew. Her father and brother, sharing her aversion, joined her in a formal refusal. Andermatt disappeared, counterfeited death; but at the end of three months he had lent more than twenty thousand francs to Gontran, and the marquis for other reasons commenced to change his opinion. To begin with, he always yielded when one insisted, from a selfish love of rest. His daughter said of him, "Oh, all papa's ideas are jumbled up," and this was true.

So when his old friend, Madame Icardon, who was connected with many Jews, wished the marriage of Christiane and Andermatt to take place, she knew very well by what line of reasoning to follow up the attack. And he consented to the marriage of William Andermatt and Christiane de Ravenel.

As for her, under the influence of Madame Icardon, an old friend of her mother's and, since the death of the marquise, Christiane's closest adviser, together with the persuasion of her father and the selfish interest of her brother, she agreed to marry this rich, fat fellow, who was not ugly, but did not please her at all, just as she would have consented to spend a summer in an unattractive place.

Now she thought him a good fellow, agreeable, not stupid, always polite; but she often laughed at him with Gontran, who was ungrateful to him.

He said to her:

"Your husband is rosier and balder than ever. He looks like a sickly flower or a sucking pig just shaved. How does he get these brilliant colors?"

She replied:

"I assure you that I have nothing

to do with it. Some days I feel just like pasting him on to a box of candied fruit."

They had reached the bathing establishment.

Two men were seated on cane bottomed chairs placed against the wall on either side of the door, and were smoking their pipes.

Gontran said:

"Look, those are two interesting types. See that one on the right, the hunchback, decked out in a Greek cap. That is old Père Printemps, once jailer at Riom, and now the caretaker, almost the superintendent, of the Enval casino. To him there has been no change, for he governs the patients just as he ruled over his former prisoners. The bathers are the prisoners, the bath-rooms are the cells, the shower-room a dungeon, and the place where Dr. Bonnefille washes out the patients' stomachs with the Baraduc tube a room of mysterious torture. He speaks to no one, because of his theory that all under sentence are despicable creatures. He looks upon the women with more interest—that is, interest mingled with wonder, for he had none under his care in the Riom prison. That retreat is designed only for men, so he has never yet become used to speaking to members of the fair sex. The other man is the bookkeeper. I defy you to make him write your name; you will see."

And Gontran, speaking to the man on the left, slowly and distinctly said:

"Monsieur Seminois, this is my sister, Mme. Andermatt, who would like to buy tickets for twelve baths."

The bookkeeper, who was very tall and very thin, with a poverty-stricken look, rose and went into his office opposite to that of the medical inspector. He opened his book and asked:

"What name?"

"Andermatt."

"You said?"

"Andermatt."

"How do you spell it?"

"A-n-d-e-r-m-a-t-t."

"All right."

And he slowly wrote it down. When he had finished, Gontran asked:

"Will you please read aloud to me my sister's name?"

"Yes, sir, Mme. Anterpat."

Christiane, laughing until she cried, paid for her tickets, then asked:

"What is that commotion that we hear up there?"

Gontran took her arm and said:

"Come and see."

The sound of two angry voices was heard coming down the stairs. They went up, opened a door, and saw a large café with a billiard table in the center. Two men in their shirt-sleeves with cues in their hands were standing one on either side of the table and abusing each other.

"Eighteen!"

"Seventeen!"

"I tell you I have eighteen!"

"That's not true, you have only seventeen!"

It was the director of the casino, M. Petrus Martel, playing his usual game of billiards with the comic actor, M. Lapalme, of the Grand Theater of Bordeaux.

Petrus Martel had been a strolling player. After he took the management of the casino of Enval he passed his days in consuming the drinks designed for the bathers. He wore an immense military mustache, steeped from morn-

ing till night in the foam of beer and the sticky syrup of liqueurs. He had aroused in the old comic actor, who was one of his recruits, an insatiable love of billiards.

They were scarcely out of bed before they began to play, abusing and threatening each other, and hardly stopping to take breakfast. Never could they be routed from the green cloth by any two patients.

They thus drove everybody else away, and enjoyed life themselves, although at the close of the season bankruptcy was staring Petrus Martel in the face.

The dejected bookkeeper watched this interminable play from morning till night, heard from morning till night this endless discussion, and carried from morning till night chops or little glasses of cordial to the indefatigable players.

But Gontran drew his sister away, saying:

"Come into the park. It's cooler there."

Suddenly they caught sight of the orchestra at the end of the building in a Chinese kiosk.

A fair young man was playing the violin with frenzy. He conducted the three queer-looking musicians facing him by movements of his head, of his hair, which floated to the measure, and by his whole body swaying back and forth, right and left, like an orchestra leader's baton. This was the *maëstro,* Saint-Landri.

One of his assistants was a pianist, whose instrument was wheeled in on rollers every morning from the hall of the bathing establishment to the kiosk. Another was an enormous flutist, who looked as if he were sucking a match as he tickled it with his puffy, fat fingers. The third was a double-bass who looked consumptive. The *maëstro* and these three together produced, with great fatigue, the perfect imitation of a wheezy barrel-organ that had startled Christiane in the village street.

As she stood watching them a gentleman spoke to her brother.

"Good-morning, my dear count."

"Good-morning, doctor."

And Gontran introduced them:

"My sister, Dr. Honorat."

She could hardly restrain her merriment as she faced this third doctor.

He bowed, and said in a complimentary way:

"I hope that madame is not ill?"

"Yes, a little."

He did not pursue the subject and changed the conversation.

"You know, my dear count, that you will soon see one of the most interesting sights that has happened ever since the very beginning of the place."

"What can it be, doctor?"

"Père Oriol, the richest peasant of all the country round, who is known to have more than fifty thousand francs of income, owns all the vineyards where the Enval brook flows out over the plain. And just at the end of the village, where the valley turns, is a little hill, or rather, high knoll, and on this knoll are Père Oriol's best vineyards. In one of these, close by the road, two steps from the brook, is a gigantic rock that hinders cultivation and casts a shadow over all that part of the field that it overlooks.

"For ten years Père Oriol has said every week that he would blow up this rock, but he has never reached the point of doing it.

"Every time a country boy left for the army, the old man said to him: 'When you come back on leave, bring me some powder for that rock of mine.'

"And the young soldiers would bring back in their knapsacks powder stolen for Père Oriol's rock. He had a whole chest full—yet the rock was never blown up.

"At last, for the past week—he had been seen drilling the rock with his son, tall Jacques, nicknamed Colosse, which they pronounced in Auvergne 'Coloche.' That very morning they had filled the hole drilled in the center of the rock with powder, then they closed the opening, leaving only a passage for the fuse which had been bought from the tobacconist's. They planned to light it at two o'clock. It should go off at five minutes past two, or ten minutes past at the latest, for the fuse was long."

Christiane was interested in this story, and was at once pleased with the idea of blasting, which recalled childish sports that delighted her simple heart.

Then they reached the end of the park.

"What would one come to further on?" she asked.

Dr. Honorat replied: "To the End of the World, madame—that is to say, to a gorge with no outlet, which is very famous in Auvergne. It is one of the finest natural curiosities of the country."

But a clock struck behind them. Gontran exclaimed: "What, time for luncheon already!" So they turned back.

A tall young man came to meet them.

Gontran said:

"My little Christiane, I would like to introduce to you M. Paul Brétigny."

To his friend he said:

"This is my sister, my dear fellow."

She thought he was very plain. He had straight black hair, closely cropped, and eyes that were too round with an expression that was almost hard. His head was too round also and very strong—one of those heads that make one think of cannon balls. His shoulders were herculean. His whole appearance struck one as somewhat wild, heavy and brutal. But a very subtle and delicate perfume exhaled from his clothing. The young lady did not recognize it, and she thought to herself: "What kind of fragrance is that?"

He addressed her:

"You came this morning, madame?"

His voice was a trifle dull.

She answered, "Yes."

At that moment Gontran saw the marquis and Andermatt motioning to them to come back quickly to lunch.

Then Dr. Honorat took leave of them, asking if they really intended to go to see the big rock blasted away.

Christiane assured him that she would go, and as she leaned on her brother's arm she whispered, as she drew him back:

"I am as hungry as a wolf. I shall be ashamed to eat so much before your friend."

CHAPTER II

A GREAT DISCOVERY

LUNCHEON took a long time, as *table d'hôte* meals do. As Christiane did not know the people at the table, she talked with her father and her brother. Then she rested until time for the blasting.

She was ready long before the hour, and made everybody start early, so as to be sure not to miss the explosion.

Near the edge of the village at the opening of the valley there was a knoll, really quite a hill, that they climbed up in the hot sun, following a little footpath between the vineyards. When they reached the top, the young woman uttered a cry of astonishment at the wide vista suddenly unfolded. Before her spread a vast plain which at once suggested the ocean. This plain, which was veiled by a light haze, blue and soft, extended to the far-off mountains, hardly visible, perhaps fifty or sixty kilometers away. Beneath this light mist that floated over the vast expanse of country one saw towns, villages, woods, great yellow fields of ripe harvests, green meadows, factories with high chimneys, and steeples built from the lava of ancient volcanoes.

"Turn round," said her brother. She turned and behind her she saw the lofty mountain studded with craters. There was first the background of Enval, a great wave of verdure in which one barely distinguished the hidden rifts of the gorges. The flood of foliage scaled the steep slope up to the first crater, which concealed from sight those above. But just at the boundary between the plains and the mountain, the latter stretched out to the left towards Clermont-Farrand, and reaching far into the distance displayed against the blue sky strange truncated peaks—dead volcanoes. And there, far over, between two peaks, one perceived yet another, loftier height, more distant still, rounded and majestic, with a strange object on its summit that looked like a ruin.

This was the Puy de Dome, the monarch of the mountains of Auvergne. Massive and mighty, it guarded on its brow, as a crown placed there by the greatest of nations, the remnants of a Roman temple.

Christiane exclaimed: "Oh! how happy I shall be here!" Indeed, she felt happy already. For she was pervaded with that feeling of ease and freedom of body and soul that makes one breathe freely, makes one alert and light-footed, when one suddenly reaches a place that delights the eye, charms and cheers one, that seems to have been waiting for one, and for which one feels one was born.

Some one called, "Madame, madame!" Then she saw, a short distance away, Dr. Honorat, who was easily recognized by his tall hat. He hastened to them and led them to the other side of the hill. Here was a grassy slope beside a thicket of low trees, where about thirty persons, strangers and peasants mingled, were already waiting.

Below them the hill sloped steeply down to the road to Riom. This was shaded by willows that overhung the narrow, bordering brook. In the center

of a vineyard skirting the brook was a high, pointed rock at the foot of which two men were kneeling as though in prayer. This was the giant rock.

The Oriols, father and son, were just attaching the fuse. A curious crowd, with an advance line of excited gamins, was watching them.

Dr. Honorat chose a comfortable place for Christiane, who seated herself with her heart beating as excitedly as if she were going to see the whole crowd blown into the air. The marquis, Andermatt and Paul Brétigny lay on the grass near the young lady, while Gontran stood beside them. He said jokingly:

"My dear doctor, you must be much less busy than your colleagues, who certainly have not an hour to lose in watching this little celebration."

Honorat answered good-humoredly:

"I am no less busy, but my patients take up less of my time. And then I would always rather amuse them than give them medicines."

He had a humorous way that pleased Gontran greatly.

More people constantly came. Among them were people from the dining-table, the Paille ladies, two widows, mother and daughter, and a very short, fat man, who was breathing like a bursting boiler. He was M. Aubry-Pasteur, a former mining engineer who had made a fortune in Paris.

The marquis and this gentleman had become acquainted. He seated himself with great care, with many cautious, preparatory movements with which Christiane was greatly amused. Gontran had gone further on to look at the rest of the people, who like themselves had come out of curiosity to the knoll.

Paul Brétigny pointed out to Christiane Andermatt the places seen in the distance. The nearest was Riom, that made a red spot of tiles on the plain, then came Ennezat, Maringues and Lezoux. Then there were many villages that could hardly be distinguished, that made only small dark holes in the green cloth of verdure. Finally, far, far off, at the base of the mountains of Forez, he tried to point out to her Thiers.

He said in an animated way:

"Look, see, just where my finger is pointing. I see it so clearly myself."

She could not see it at all, but she was not surprised that he could, for his eyes looked like those of a bird of prey, round and fixed. One felt that they were as powerful as marine telescopes.

He continued:

"The Allier flows in the midst of the plain before us, but it is not possible to see it. It is too distant, at thirty kilometers from us."

She really hardly tried to distinguish what he pointed out, for her eyes and thoughts were all centered on the great rock. She thought to herself that in a short time the huge rock would be no more, that it would be blown away in dust, and she was touched with the vague pity of a little girl for a broken plaything. It had been there for such a long time, this poor stone, and it was so pretty and harmless. The two men, who had now risen, were shoveling gravel around the base with the rapid movements of peasants when in a hurry.

The crowd on the road, which had constantly grown, came nearer to watch. The little urchins capered about, dodging around the workmen like young

animals at play. From the height where Christiane was seated the people looked very small, like a swarm of ants at work. The murmur of voices rose, sometimes low, barely audible, but at times louder. It was then a confused clamor of calls and movements of the people, but broken by the distance, attenuated so as to be mere shattered fragments of sound. The crowd on the knoll was increased. The people came in a stream from the village and covered the slope which commanded a view of the condemned rock.

They called to one another and sat together by hotels, classes and castes. The noisiest of these groups was that of the actors and musicians, presided over by their director, Petrus Martel of the Odéon, who on this occasion had deserted his frenzied game of billiards.

With a panama on his head, his shoulders covered with a black alpaca coat, his great white paunch standing out like a hump—for he thought a waistcoat unnecessary in the country—the actor with the mustachios took on the air of a commander, and pointed out, explained and commented on all the movements of the Oriols. His subordinates, the comic actor Lapalme, Petitnivelle, who took the part of the lovers, and the musicians, the *maëstro* Saint-Landri, the pianist Javel, the huge flutist Noirot, and the double-bass Nicordi, all surrounded and listened to him. In front of them three women sat sheltered by three parasols, one white, one red, and one blue, that made under the early afternoon sun an odd and dazzling French flag. They were Mlle. Odelin, the actress who took the part of heroines, her mother, who was hired, Gontran said, and the cashier of the café, who usually accompanied these ladies. The arrangement of the parasols in the national colors was an invention of Petrus Martel, who after he had seen the blue and white ones carried by the Odelin ladies, made a present of the red one to his cashier.

Near them another group drew as much attention and notice as they. It was that of the chefs and scullions of the hotels, eight in number, who were trying to see which of them could most impress the crowd, from the cooks in linen jackets down to their dish washers. As they all stood up, the full light of day fell on their flat caps, and they had at once the aspect of a strange-looking staff of white lancers and of a delegation of cooks.

The marquis asked Dr. Honorat:

"Where do all these people come from? I should never have thought there were so many in Enval."

"Oh, they have come from all the region round, from Châtel-Guyon, Tournoël, La Roche-Pradière, and Saint-Hippolyte. For, you know, for a long time this event has been the talk of the country. Then Père Oriol is quite a celebrity and an influential man because of his wealth. Besides, he is a true man of Auvergne, who has always stayed a peasant, working himself, economizing, saving up money, trustworthy with money, intelligent, full of ideas and plans for his children."

Gontran returned, excited, his eyes sparkling. He said in a low tone:

"Paul, Paul, come with me. I will show you two pretty girls; oh, yes, very pretty indeed, you know."

The other raised his head and answered:

"My dear fellow, I am very com-

fortable here. I won't stir."

"You are making a mistake. They are charming."

Then raising his voice he said:

"The doctor will tell me who they are. Two young girls eighteen or nineteen years old, looking like country ladies, oddly dressed in black silk dresses, with tight-fitting sleeves, dresses that look like uniforms, nun's robes, two brunettes——"

Dr. Honorat interrupted:

"That is enough. They are the daughters of Père Oriol, two fine girls, educated by the black nuns of Clermont. They will make splendid matches. They are two types, but two good types of our race, of the good race of Auvergne, for I am a man of Auvergne, marquis, and I will show you those two young girls over there——"

Gontran interrupted him mischievously:

"Are you the physician of the Oriol family, doctor?"

The other saw through his meaning, and answered simply, "Parbleu!" very merrily.

The young man continued:

"How did you manage to gain the confidence of this rich patient?"

"By prescribing that he should drink a great deal of good wine."

Then he gossiped about the Oriols. He was distantly related to them, and had known them for a long time. The old man, the father, was quite a character. He was very proud of his wine, and he had one vineyard in particular from which all the wine produced had to be consumed by the family, by no one but the family and their guests. Some years they easily emptied the casks that this choice vineyard supplied, but other years they only did so with great difficulty.

About the month of May or June, when Père Oriol saw that he would have a hard time drinking up all that was left, he began to urge on his tall son, Colosse, saying: "Come, boy, it must be finished." Then they commenced to pour down their throats litres of red wine from morning till night. Twenty times during each meal the good man said gravely, as he tipped the jug against his son's glass, "Must be finished." And as all this alcoholic liquid heated his blood and prevented his sleeping, he rose at night, slipped on his trousers, lighted a lamp and woke "Coloche." Then they went down to the cellar, taking from the sideboard a crust of bread that they dipped into their glasses, filled draught on draught at the very cask itself. Then when they had drunk enough to feel the wine rippling about in their stomachs, the father tapped the sounding wood of the cask to listen whether the level of the liquor was lower.

The marquis asked:

"Are those the men who are working around the great rock?"

"Yes, the very ones."

Just at this moment the two men hastened away from the rock that was filled with powder, and all the surrounding crowd took flight like a routed army. They scattered towards Riom and towards Enval, leaving the great rock standing quite alone on a hillock covered with short grass and stones, for it cut the vineyard in two and the ground near it had never been cleared.

The crowd above was now as large as the other and was quivering with pleasure and impatience. The deep voice

of Petrus Martel announced: "Attention! the fuse is lighted."

A shiver of expectation passed over Christiane. But the doctor whispered behind her:

"Oh! if they have used the whole length of the fuse that I saw them buy, there will be at least enough to last ten minutes."

All eyes were fixed on the rock. Suddenly, a dog, a little black dog, a sort of mongrel, went up to it. He walked all around it, smelled it and no doubt discovered a suspicious scent, for he began to yelp with all his might. His legs were stiff, the hair on his back bristled, his tail was stretched out straight, and his ears were pricked up.

A laugh ran through the crowd—a cruel laugh, for they hoped he would not get away in time. Then voices called to coax him back, men whistled and tried throwing stones, but they fell short. Still the cur did not stir and barked furiously at the rock.

Christiane began to tremble. She had a horrible dread of seeing the dog blown to pieces. All her pleasure was over. She repeated nervously, stammering, trembling with distress:

"Oh, mon Dieu! oh, mon Dieu! he will be killed! I cannot bear to see it! I cannot! I cannot! Let us go away——"

Her neighbor, Paul Brétigny, rose and without a word ran towards the great rock as quickly as his long legs could carry him.

Cries of horror burst from the crowd, a clamor of terror, and the mongrel, when he saw the tall man coming towards him, ran round the rock. Paul followed him, the dog went round to the other side, and for a minute or two they both ran round the rock, coming and going, now to the right, then to the left, as if they were playing a game of hide-and-seek.

Seeing at last that he could not catch the creature, the young man began to climb up the slope again, and the dog recommenced his furious barking.

Cries of anger greeted the return of the breathless, rash young man. For people never forgive those who have made them tremble. Christiane choked with emotion and pressed her hands against her beating heart. She lost her head so far as to exclaim: "At least, you were not injured!" Gontran, who was furious, cried: "The man is crazy, he never before committed such follies. I never saw such an idiot!"

The ground swayed, rose. A great detonation shook the whole place, and for nearly a minute thundered among the mountains and was repeated by the echoes like so many reports of a cannon.

Christiane saw nothing but a shower of stones and a high column of earth sinking back to the ground.

Instantly the crowd, with piercing yells, rushed down from above like a wave. The battalion of scullions bounded and tumbled down the knoll, leaving far behind the regiment of actors, who descended with Petrus Martel at their head.

The tricolor parasols came near being swept away in the rush.

Everyone ran, men, women, peasants and townsmen. One saw them falling, rising, and rushing on again. On the road, the two tides of people driven back a few moments before by fear now rolled towards one another to jostle and mingle together at the site of the explosion.

"Let us wait a little," said the marquis, "until their curiosity is appeased, before we take our turn at looking."

The engineer, M. Aubry-Pasteur, who had just risen with infinite pains, said:

"As for me, I shall return to the village by the footpaths. There is nothing more to keep me here."

He shook hands with them, bowed and walked away.

Dr. Honorat had vanished. They talked about him, the marquis saying to his son:

"You have known him for only three days, yet you make fun of him all the time. You will end by offending him."

But Gontran shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"Oh, he is a philosopher, a true skeptic, that fellow! I'll warrant that he won't get angry. When we two are alone together he laughs at everything and everybody, beginning with his patients and their mineral drinks. I'll treat you to a box at the theater if ever you see him vexed at my jokes."

Meanwhile there was great excitement below at the spot where the rock had been blasted. The great surging crowd jostled, swayed and shouted, overcome with the excitement of an unexpected surprise.

Andermatt, always active and full of curiosity, inquired:

"What is the matter with them? What in the world is the matter with them?"

Gontran said he would go and see, and left them. Christiane, no longer interested, thought how it would have taken only a little less length of fuse to have resulted in the death of her foolhardy neighbor, who would have let himself be blown to pieces because she had been anxious over the life of a dog. She thought that this man must indeed be very wild and reckless to thus needlessly expose himself to danger to gratify a wish of a lady that was a stranger.

Persons on the road were now seen running towards the village. The marquis wondered in his turn, "What is the matter with them?" And Andermatt, no longer able to resist his curiosity, started down the hill.

Gontran from below motioned to them to come.

Paul Brétigny asked:

"Will you take my arm, madame?"

She took his arm, which felt as steady as iron, and as her foot slipped on the dry grass, she leaned upon it as though it were a railing, with absolute confidence.

Gontran, who came to meet them, cried:

"It's a spring. The explosion has made a spring gush up."

So they went into the crowd. Then the two young men, Paul and Gontran, went ahead and pushed the people aside, disregarding their grumbling, and opened a way for Christiane and her father.

They walked over a confused mass of sharp, broken, powder-blackened stones until they came in front of a hole full of muddy water, that bubbled up and flowed among the feet of the people, down towards the river. Andermatt was at the spring already, for he had made his way through the crowd by methods of insinuation which, Gontran said, were peculiar to himself. He was watching with profound interest the water springing up from the ground and flowing away.

Dr. Honorat, standing opposite to

him on the other side of the hole, was looking at it too, but with an air of bored surprise. Andermatt said to him:

"You should taste it; perhaps it is mineral."

The doctor replied:

"No doubt it is a mineral spring. They all are here. Soon there will be more springs than patients."

The other repeated:

"But you must taste it."

The doctor did not bother himself about it.

"We must wait at least until it has cleared."

Everyone wanted to see it. Those in the row behind pushed those ahead right into the mud. A child fell down in it and made them laugh.

The Oriols, father and son, were there looking gravely at this unexpected spring, and did not know what to think of it. The father was a dried-up old man with a tall, thin body and a bony face—the solemn-looking face of beardless peasants. The son, taller still, was a veritable giant. He also was thin, wore a mustache, and looked like a trooper and a wine-grower at once.

The bubbling of the water meanwhile seemed to increase, it grew in volume and commenced to clear.

There was a movement in the crowd, and Dr. Latonne appeared with a glass in his hand. He was perspiring and panting, and was rooted to the spot when he saw his colleague, Dr. Honorat, with one foot resting on the edge of the new spring, like a general entered first into a conquered city.

He asked, hesitatingly:

"Have you tasted it?"

"No, I am waiting until it clears."

Then Dr. Latonne plunged in his glass and drank with the knowing air of experts tasting wines. Then he announced, "Excellent!"—a word that did not commit him, and handing the glass to his rival, asked: "Will you try some?"

But Dr. Honorat evidently did not enjoy mineral waters, for he answered, smiling:

"No, thanks! It's quite enough that you have tested its merits. I know their flavor."

He knew the flavor of all of them, and he appraised them, too, but in a different way, for turning to Père Oriol, he said:

"That is not equal to your good vintage."

The old man was flattered.

Christiane was satisfied, and wanted to leave. Her brother and Paul again opened a way for her through the crowd. She followed them, leaning on her father's arm. Suddenly she slipped and nearly fell. Then looking down at her feet she saw that she had stepped on a piece of bleeding flesh, covered with black hair and sticky with mud. It was part of the mongrel that had been torn to pieces by the explosion and trampled under foot by the crowd.

She was filled with emotion and could not restrain her tears. And she sobbed as she dried her eyes with her handkerchief: "Poor little thing, poor little thing!" She did not want to hear anything more, she wanted to go home and shut herself in. This day, so brightly begun, ended unhappily. Was it an omen? Her shrinking heart beat fast.

They were now alone on the road, and they caught sight in front of them of a tall hat and two tails of a frock coat fluttering like two black wings. It

was Dr. Bonnefille coming last of all, and running with a glass in his hand, like Dr. Latonne.

He stopped when he saw the marquis.

"What is it, marquis? They told me —a spring?—a mineral spring?"

"Yes, my dear doctor."

"Abundant?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Are—are—they there?"

Gontran gravely answered:

"Yes, indeed, of course. Dr. Latonne has even made an analysis already."

Then Dr. Bonnefille began to run towards the spring again, while Christiane, a little diverted and cheered by his laughable appearance, said:

"After all, I do not want to go back to the hotel. Let us go and sit in the park."

Andermatt had stayed over there by the spring, watching the water flow.

CHAPTER III

WHEN DOCTORS DISAGREE

THE *table d'hôte* was noisy that evening at the Grand Hotel. The subject of the great rock and the spring had excited conversation. The diners were not many, however, only about twenty in all. They were mostly rather taciturn people, quiet and ill. They had in vain tried all the known springs, and were now experimenting with the new resorts. At the end of the table occupied by the Ravenels and Andermatts there were first the Monécus, a little man who was very white, with his daughter, a very pale girl, who sometimes rose in the middle of a meal and left her plate half-full. Beyond them was the fat M. Aubry-Pasteur, the former mining engineer. Then came the Chaufours, a family in mourning that one met all day long on the paths of the park, walking behind a little carriage in which their deformed child was wheeled. After them were the Paille ladies, mother and daughter, both widows, tall and large all over, in front and behind. "You can easily see," said Gontran, "that they ate their husbands, and that is what upset their stomachs."

Farther on was a very red-faced man, brick-red, who also had a bad digestion. Then the rest were inconspicuous persons, those mute travelers that enter the dining-room of the hotels with noiseless steps, the woman in front, the man behind, who bow the moment they enter the door and take their seats with a timid, retiring air. All the other end of the table was empty, although places were set there for future guests.

Andermatt talked with animation. He had spent the afternoon conversing with Dr. Latonne, and had let fall great schemes for the development of Enval.

The doctor had given him a glowing account of the wonderful merits of the Enval mineral water. It was much superior to that of Châtel-Guyon, although the fame of the latter had been growing for the past two years.

There was to the right that hole,

Royat, which was booming, and on the left that hole Châtel-Guyon, put on a paying basis in such a short time. What couldn't one do with Enval, if one only knew how!

He said, speaking to the engineer:

"Yes, sir, everything is there, if one knows how to develop it. It's all a matter of skill, tact, seizing the opportunity, and pluck. In opening a watering-place you must know how to launch it, nothing more, and in order to launch it the great medical corps of Paris must be interested in it. As for me, sir, I always seek out the practical method, the only method that will insure success in each special case I am engaged with, and until I have found it I do nothing, I wait. It's not enough to have the mineral water; you must make people drink it, and to make them drink it, it is not sufficient for one oneself to advertise in the papers and elsewhere that it is unrivaled. One must know how to have this said persuasively by the only men who have influence with the people who will drink it, with the sick people that we need here, with the class of very credulous persons who spend their money in medicaments, that is, by the doctors. Do not address the court except through lawyers; it will pay attention only to them, and will understand them only; do not address the sick except through doctors, they will listen only to them."

The marquis, who admired the practical, reliable good sense of his son-in-law, exclaimed:

"Ah! that is certainly true. You have a wonderful faculty of reaching the point exactly, my dear fellow."

Andermatt excitedly continued:

"A fortune could be made here. The country is admirably suited, the climate is excellent. I only question one thing: would we have enough water for a large establishment? For things done by halves are always a failure. We should need a really large establishment and, consequently, a great deal of water—enough to supply two hundred baths at the same time with a rapid, continuous flow. But the new spring and the old together would not supply fifty, according to Dr. Latonne——"

M. Aubry-Pasteur interrupted him:

"Oh, as far as the water is concerned, I can supply you with all you wish."

Andermatt was astounded.

"You?"

"Yes, I. That astonishes you, but I will explain. Last year about this very time I was here just as now, for the baths of Enval agree with me. Then one morning I was resting in my room when I saw a stout gentleman arrive. He was the president of the board of administration of the establishment. He was very much troubled for the following reason: the Bonnefille spring was getting so low that they feared it would cease to flow altogether. As they knew that I was a mining engineer, they came to ask me if I could find any way of saving their enterprise.

"I at once set to work studying the geology of the country. You know that in every part of the region primitive displacements have brought about different local underground conditions.

"The question was thus to discover where the mineral water came from, through what fissures it rose, the direction of these fissures, and their origin and character.

"First, I looked over the establishment with great care, and I saw thrown

in a corner a piece of old bath-pipe no longer in use. I noticed that it was then almost wholly closed by accumulations of lime. Thus it was evident that the water deposited its soluble salts on the sides of the conduits and closed them in a short time. Necessarily it would be deposited in a similar way in the natural conduits of the ground mass, which was granite. Clearly the Bonnefille spring was stopped up. Nothing more.

"The question then was how to tap it further on. Everyone had looked for it above the original opening. But I, after my studies, observations, and reasoning, looked for it, and I found it fifty meters further down. This was for the following cause:

"As I said just now, it was first necessary to determine the origin, character, and direction of the fissures in which the water flowed through the granite. I readily proved that these fissures led from the plain towards the mountain, and not from the mountain to the plain, which sloped at an angle like a roof. This no doubt resulted from a sinking of the plain, which drew downward with it, as it sank, the original buttresses of the mountains. Therefore the water, instead of descending, rose through every fissure in the granite-beds. So I discovered the cause of this unexpected phenomenon.

"Originally Limagne, that vast stretch of sandy and clayey soil of which one can hardly see the limits, was on a level with the first plateaus of the mountains; but as a result of the underground geological conditions it sank, drawing downwards with it the edge of the mountain, as I just explained. Now this extensive settling of the plain formed at the boundary between the sand and clay and the granite a great barrier of clay. This is of great depth and is impervious to water.

"And this is what happened:

"The mineral water comes from the bed of ancient volcanoes. That which flows a long distance cools on the way, and comes to the surface chilled, at the temperature of ordinary springs. That which flows a less distance gushes up while it is still warm, at different temperatures, according to the distance from the source of heat. This is the path the water follows: It descends to unknown depths until it reaches the clay barrier of Limagne. Unable to pass through this and under great hydrostatic pressure, it seeks an outlet. Then it finds the sloping crevices in the granite, enters them, and rises through them to a level just beneath the surface soil. There the water takes again its original downward flow, and follows the stream-beds down to the plain. I may add that we do not see a hundredth part of the mineral water of these valleys. We find only those that reach the surface as springs; the majority when they reach the upper ends of the fissures ecape beneath a thick layer of vegetable mould and soil, by which they are absorbed.

"My conclusions from these facts are: First. To find the mineral water one must look along the dip and strike of the overlying layers of granite.

"Second. To keep a spring flowing, the fissures must be kept from being plugged up by calcareous deposits. This can be accomplished by digging artificial shafts.

"Third. To tap the source of a given spring, a boring must be made down to the same fissure at a place above and

not below the first, on condition of course that one operates on this side of the clay barrier that forces the water to rise upward.

"From this point of view, the spring discovered to-day is admirably situated at only a few meters from the barrier. If one wished to found a new resort, that is the spot where it should be placed."

There was a pause when he had finished speaking.

Andermatt, perfectly delighted, said only:

"Isn't that wonderful? When one sees behind the scenes all the mystery vanishes. You are a valuable man, M. Aubry-Pasteur."

He and the marquis and Paul Brétigny were the only ones that had understood this explanation. Gontran alone had not heard a word of it. The rest stretched their ears and listened with wide-eyed astonishment to the words that fell from the lips of the engineer, perfectly dazed with astonishment. The Paille ladies especially, who were very devout, asked themselves if this explanation of a phenomenon established by God and accomplished according to His mysterious way was not in a manner irreligious. The mother thought it her duty to say: "The ways of Providence are inscrutable." The ladies near the center of the table showed their approval of this by an inclination of their heads, for they were also disturbed at having heard such incomprehensible words.

M. Riquier, the brick-red-faced man, declared:

"For all I care, the waters of Enval may come from the volcanoes or from the moon. Here I've been taking them for ten days and feel no effect at all."

M. and Mme. Chaufour protested against this in the name of their child, who was beginning to move his right leg, which he had never done during the six years that he had been under treatment.

Riquier replied:

"Parbleu! That proves that we have not got the same disease. It does not prove that the Enval waters cure affections of the stomach."

He seemed in a furious temper, exasperated at the failure of this new experiment.

Then M. Monécu also took up the cause in the name of his daughter. He declared that for the past eight days she had begun to digest her food, and was not obliged to leave the table at every meal.

And his tall daughter blushed and looked down at her plate.

The Paille ladies also were better.

Then Riquier grew furious, and turning abruptly towards the two women, said:

"You have stomach trouble, you ladies?"

Both answered together:

"Yes, indeed, sir, we cannot digest anything."

He almost hurled himself from his chair, stammering:

"You—you—— It's enough to look at you. You have stomach trouble, you ladies? In other words, you eat too much."

Madame Paille, the mother, furious, replied:

"As far as you are concerned, sir, there's no doubt. You show too well the disposition of persons who have lost their digestion. It's a true saying that

good stomachs make good-natured men."

A very thin old lady, whose name no one knew, said with an air of authority:

"I think that everyone would find the waters of Enval more beneficial if the chef of the hotel would occasionally remember that he is cooking for invalids. Really, he gives us things that are impossible to digest."

At this all the table struck a harmonious chord. Indignation against the hotel manager who served lobster, pork, eels, cabbages, cabbage and sausages, all the most indigestible dishes in the world, to people for whom the three doctors, Bonnefille, Latonne and Honorat, ordered only white meats, lean and tender, fresh vegetables, and milk diet.

Riquier, trembling with rage, said:

"Is it not the duty of the doctors to supervise the table at the hot springs, rather than to leave such an important matter as food to the choice of an ignorant brute? As it is, we are served every day with hard-boiled eggs, anchovies, and ham as side dishes——"

M. Monécu interrupted:

"Oh, pardon me, but my daughter can digest only ham, and it was prescribed for her by Mas-Roussel and Remusot."

Riquier exclaimed:

"Ham! ham! why, it is a poison, sir."

Then at once the table was divided into two factions, one which tolerated ham and one which did not tolerate ham.

An interminable discussion began, that was continued every day, on the value of foods.

Even milk was passionately discussed, for Riquier could not drink a glass of it mixed with Bordeaux without suffering immediately from indigestion.

Aubry-Pasteur, who was angry in his turn because the merits of foods of which he was fond were called in question, cried out at this:

"But, *sapristi*, sir, if you suffer from dyspepsia and I from gastralgia, we require foods as different as are the glasses needed by near-sighted and far-sighted people, yet both of these classes of persons have disorders of the eyes."

He added:

"Now, as far as I am concerned, I have a smothering sensation when I drink a glass of red wine, and I think there is nothing worse for man than wine. All who drink water live for a hundred years, while we——"

Gontran said, laughing:

"*Ma foi!* without wine, and without —marriage—I would find life rather monotonous."

The Paille ladies lowered their eyes. They drank freely the best Bordeaux wine, unmixed with water, and their double widowhood seemed to show that they had applied the same method to their husbands, for the daughter was only twenty-two years old and the mother hardly forty.

But Andermatt, who was usually such a chatterbox, was quiet and thoughtful. Suddenly he asked Gontran:

"Do you know where the Oriols live?"

"Yes, their house was recently pointed out to me."

"Could you take me there after dinner?"

"Yes, indeed, and I should even enjoy going there with you. I wouldn't be at all sorry to see those two little girls again."

So as soon as the dinner was over

they started, while Christiane, the marquis, and Paul Brétigny went up to the sitting-room to spend the evening.

It was still bright daylight, for people dine early at hot springs resorts.

Andermatt, taking his brother-in-law's arm, said:

"My dear Gontran, if this old fellow is reasonable and if the analysis gives what Dr. Latonne hopes for, I will probably open up something on a large scale here—a watering-place."

He paused in the middle of the street, and, taking his companion by the lapels of his coat, said: "Ah! you don't understand, you people, how fascinating business is—not mere buying and selling, but large enterprises like ours. Yes, my dear fellow, when one understands them fully, one sees that great enterprises include everything that men have ever been interested in. They are at once politics, war, diplomacy—everything, everything! One must always be searching, finding, inventing, understanding everything, foreseeing everything, daring everything. The battle of to-day is waged with money. As for me, I always look on coins of a hundred sous as little soldiers in red breeches, on twenty-franc pieces as glittering lieutenants, on bills of a hundred francs as captains, and on those of a thousand as generals. And I fight, *sacré bleu!* I fight from morning till night with everybody, with everybody.

"This is to live, to live grandly, like the great men of old. We are the great men of to-day, the truly great, the men of power! Look, see this village, this poor village! I will make a city of it, I myself, a white city, full of large hotels, filled with people, with elevators, servants, carriages, a crowd of rich people waited on by a crowd of poor. I will do all this because one evening it chanced to please me to fight against Royat on the right, Châtel-Guyon on the left, against Mont-Doré, La Bourboule, Châteauneuf, Saint-Nectaire, which are behind us, and against Vichy, opposite. And I will succeed because I know the method, the only method. It struck me all at once, just as a great general sees the weak point of an enemy. In our business one must also know how to manage men, to win them as well as to overcome them. *Cristi,* how interesting it is to live when one can do such things! I shall get enough enjoyment out of my town to last for three years. Just think what a piece of luck it was our meeting that engineer who told us splendid things at dinner—splendid, my dear fellow! His theory is as clear as day. Thanks to him, I can ruin the old company without even having to buy it out."

He started on again, and they walked slowly up the road to the left towards Châtel-Guyon.

Gontran would say: "When I pass near my brother-in-law, I distinctly hear in his head the same sound as in the halls of Monte Carlo—the sound of gold tossed up, thrown down, drawn in, scraped up, lost, and won!"

And truly, Andermatt gave one the idea of being a strange human machine made only to calculate, circulate, and manipulate money. Besides, he was very vain over his wits, and boasted that he could tell at the first glance the real value of anything whatever. So one might see him, every moment, wherever he happened to be, take an article up, examine it, replace it and say: "That is worth so much." His wife and his

brother-in-law were much entertained by this mania and amused themselves by deceiving him. They would show him queer-looking articles of furniture and beg him to tell them the values, and when he was at a loss to set a value on them, the two laughed together like lunatics. Sometimes, too, right in the street in Paris, Gontran would stop him in front of a store and make him appraise the entire show-window, or give an estimate of the value of a hobbling hack horse, or maybe of a moving van with all the furniture it carried.

One evening at table at a large dinner-party at his sister's he called on William to tell what the obelisk was worth. Then, when the other had given some figure or other, he asked the same question in regard to the Solferino bridge and the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile. Finally he said solemnly: "You could write a very interesting work on the value of the principal monuments of the world."

Andermatt never got angry, and lent himself to all their jokes, as a man who was superior and sure of himself.

When Gontran asked one day: "And I, how much am I worth?" William refused to answer; and when his brother-in-law insisted, saying, "See here, suppose I was captured by brigands, what would you give to ransom me?" he replied at last: "Well! well! I would give a note for you, my dear boy." And his smile was so expressive that the other, a trifle vexed, did not insist further.

Andermatt, besides, was very fond of objects of art. He had very refined taste, great appreciation, and he hunted them up cleverly, with the bloodhound's scent that he used in all his commercial transactions.

They had reached an ordinary-looking house. Gontran stopped and said: "It's here."

An iron knocker hung on a heavy oak door. They knocked and a slender servant girl came to open it.

The banker asked:

"Monsieur Oriol?"

The woman replied:

"Come in."

They went into a kitchen, a great farmhouse kitchen, where a little fire was still burning under a pot. Then they passed into another room where the Oriol family was gathered. The father was asleep, his back against one chair, his feet on another. The son, with his two elbows on the table, was reading the *Petit Journal* with the desperate effort at attention of a weak mind that is always drifting away. The two daughters sat in the same window-seat, and were working at the same piece of tapestry that had been commenced at the two ends.

They were the first to rise, astonished at this unexpected visit. Then tall Jacques raised his head, flushed with his mental effort. Then at last Père Oriol woke and drew back, one after the other, his long legs that were stretched out on the second chair. The room was bare, whitewashed, paved, furnished with straw-bottomed chairs, a mahogany chest, four prints of Épinal framed under glass, and large white curtains.

They all stared with surprise, and the servant stood at the door motionless from curiosity.

Andermatt went forward, introduced himself and his brother-in-law, the Count of Ravenel. He bowed low to

the young girls and then sat quietly down and continued:

"Monsieur Oriol, I am here to talk business with you. I will not spend time beating about the bush in telling it, either. Here is the project. You have just discovered a spring in your vineyard. The analysis of the water will be made in a few days. If it proves worthless, of course I shall withdraw; but if, on the contrary, it gives what I hope, I will offer to make a purchase from you of that part and all the surrounding land.

"Consider it well. No one else could make such an offer, not a soul. The old company is on the verge of bankruptcy, so it can't undertake to build a new establishment, and besides, the failure of the first would not encourage any new ventures.

"Don't give me any answer to-day; talk it over with your family. As soon as the analysis is known, you can set your price. If it suits me I will accept it, if not I will abandon it. I never haggle over prices."

The peasant, who was a business man in his own way and as shrewd as anyone, answered politely that he would see, that he felt honored, and that he would think it over. Then he offered the visitors a glass of wine.

Andermatt accepted, then as it was growing dusk, Oriol said to his daughters, who with downcast eyes had resumed their work:

"Give us some light, my little girls."

They both rose at once, went into an adjoining room and soon returned, one carrying two lighted candles, the other four glasses without stems, such as the poor use. The candles were new, ornamented with pink paper, and were evidently ornaments from the girls' mantelpiece.

Then Colosse rose, for only the men of the house went to the wine-cellar.

Andermatt had a happy thought.

"It would give me pleasure to see your wine-cellar. You are the leading vine-grower of the whole country round, so it must be a very fine one."

This reached Père Oriol's heart, and taking a torch he went on ahead to guide them. They recrossed the kitchen and went down into a cellar where a faint light half revealed casks standing empty, giant millstones rolled into a corner and pierced with a hole in the center like wheels of some antique, colossal chariot, and a press with wooden screws. It had been taken apart, and the brown wood polished with use caught a reflection from the light, and suddenly shone in the darkness. Then there were tools with steel polished by contact with the earth until they glittered like weapons. One after another these objects were lighted up as the old man passed by with a candle in one hand and a reflector in the other.

One already smelt the wine and the grapes pressed and dry. They then came to a double-locked door. Père Oriol opened it, and raising the torch suddenly above his head showed dimly a long line of hogsheads in a row, and, resting on their rounded sides, another row of smaller casks. First of all, he pointed out that this cellar, which was all on one level, was excavated right into the mountain. Then he described the contents of the puncheons, the vintages, the harvests, and the merits of the wines. Finally, when he arrived in front of the family cask, he caressed it as one might stroke the neck of a

favorite horse, and said with pride in his voice:

"That's the one you shall taste. There isn't a bottled wine that is its equal, not one, either at Bordeaux or anywhere else."

For he had the countryman's taste for wine that remains in the cask.

Colosse, who had followed them carrying a large jug, bent down, and turned on the tap of the spigot while his father threw the light on it as if it were a difficult and delicate piece of work.

The light of the candle struck full on their faces—that of the father like an old attorney's and that of the son like a soldier peasant's face.

Andermatt whispered in Gontran's ear:

"Look, what a fine Teniers!"

The young man replied in a low tone:

"I like the girls better."

Then they went back, and to please the two Oriols they had to drink a good deal of the wine.

The girls had drawn their chairs nearer to the table, and gone on with their work as if no one had been there. Gontran looked at them all the time, and wondered whether they were twins, for they were so much alike. One, however, was fatter and smaller, and the other more distinguished looking. Their glossy hair, which was chestnut rather than black, was dressed in flat bandeaux at the sides of their heads and shone at the slightest movement. They had the somewhat prominent jaw and forehead of the people of Auvergne, and cheekbones a little too marked; but charming mouths, lovely eyes, eyebrows of unusual delicacy, and deliciously fresh complexions. One felt when one saw them that they had not been brought up in this house, but at a fashionable boarding school, at the convent where the rich and aristocratic young ladies of Auvergne were sent. It was evident that they had there acquired the refined manners of girls of good society.

But Gontran, who felt a distaste for the glass of red wine set before him, touched Andermatt's foot, as a hint to leave. Finally he rose, and they both shook hands energetically with the peasants. Then they again bowed ceremoniously to the young girls, who responded this time without rising, by a slight inclination of the head.

The moment they were in the street, Andermatt began to talk again:

"Ah, my dear fellow, what an odd family! How evident is the transition there from the lower to the upper classes of society! They needed the son to cultivate the vineyards, in order to save the salary of a man—stupid economy—so they kept him at work, and he belongs to the common people. As for the girls, they are almost like society people. Let them only make good marriages, and they will look as well as any of our wives, and a great deal better than most of them. I am as pleased to have seen those people there as a geologist is when he has found a fossil animal of the Tertiary period."

Gontran asked:

"Which one do you like best?"

"Which, what do you mean, which? Which what?"

"Of those young girls?"

"Oh, well—indeed, I am sure I don't know. I did not look at them with a view to comparing them. But why does that interest you? You are not intend-

ing to carry one off?"

Gontran began to laugh.

"Oh, no, but I am delighted to meet for once women with such freshness, a freshness that they never have with us. I like to look at them as you like to look at a Teniers. Nothing pleases me so much as pretty girls, no matter where or of what class they may be. They are my objects of art. I do not collect them, but I admire them. I admire them passionately as an artist, my dear fellow, as a disinterested artist. Do you blame me? I love it. By the way, couldn't you lend me five thousand francs?"

The other paused and muttered "Again," emphatically.

Gontran answered simply: "Always!" Then they continued their walk.

Andermatt resumed:

"What the mischief do you do with the money?"

"I spend it."

"Yes, but you spend it too freely."

"My dear friend, I am as fond of spending money as you are of making it. Don't you see?"

"Very clearly, but you do not earn it."

"That's true. Well, I don't know. One can't have everything. Now you know how to earn it, but you don't know at all how to spend it. The only use you seem to have for money is to put it out at interest. But I don't know how to earn it, though I know admirably how to spend it. It procures for me a thousand things that you know only by name. We were evidently made to be brothers-in-law, for we are perfect complements of one another."

Andermatt muttered:

"What a crazy fellow! No, you shall not have five thousand francs, but I will lend you fifteen hundred—because—because I may need your help in several days."

Gontran answered very calmly:

"Then I accept them as partial payment."

The other tapped him on the shoulder without replying.

They came near to the park, that was lighted by paper lanterns hanging in the branches of the trees. The casino orchestra played a slow, classic air that hobbled along, full of lapses and stops. It was executed by the same four musicians. They were worn out with incessant playing, morning and night, in this lonely place to the leaves and the brook, with producing the effect of twenty instruments, and weary, too, with not being paid much at the end of the month. Petrus Martel always completed their salary with baskets of wine or litres of liqueurs that the bathers never drank.

Through the din of the concert one could distinguish the noise of the billiards, the striking of the balls, and voices calling monotonously, "Twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two."

Andermatt and Gontran went up. M. Aubry-Pasteur and Dr. Honorat, all alone, were drinking their coffee near the musicians. Petrus Martel and Lapalme played their mad game, and the cashier woke up to ask:

"What would the gentlemen like?"

CHAPTER IV

A TEST CASE

The Oriols, father and son, talked together a long time after the girls had gone to bed. Wrought up and excited by Andermatt's proposition, they sought ways of inflaming his desire without endangering their interests. As they were careful, practical peasants, they wisely weighed all chances. They realized that in a region where mineral springs flow along all the stream-courses, it would not do to repel this unlooked-for amateur, who could not be duplicated, by asking too large a price. Yet it would not do to let this spring, which might some day give a flood of liquid silver, slip too easily from their hands. Royat and Châtel-Guyon had taught them a lesson.

So they sought for ways to kindle to a frenzy the banker's desire. They imagined various fictitious companies that would make other offers, and thought up a series of awkward schemes that they felt were imperfect, but were the best they could invent. They slept badly, and in the morning the father, who was the first to wake, wondered to himself if the spring had not vanished during the night. For after all it was possible that it had gone as it had come, that it had re-entered the earth, and would be impossible to rediscover. He rose uneasy and restless, roused his son, and confided to him his fear. Thereupon, the huge Colosse thrust his legs from the gray bedclothes and dressed to go out with his father.

At any rate, they would tidy up the fields and the spring. They would take away the stones, make it all pretty and neat as one does an animal that one hopes to sell.

So they shouldered their pickaxes and shovels, and set out side by side with a long, swinging gait.

They walked along without looking at anything, preoccupied with their business, and answering with a single word the greetings of the neighbors and friends they met. When they reached the road to Riom, they began to feel agitated and looked to see whether they could discern the water bubbling up in the distance and gleaming in the morning sun. The dusty white road was deserted. It was bordered by the brook which some willows overhung. Under one of these Père Oriol suddenly saw two feet, then, when he walked three steps further on, he recognized Père Clovis, seated on the roadside, with his crutches lying on the grass beside him.

He was an old paralytic, famous throughout the country through which he had tramped for the past ten years in a slow and painful way, on his oaken legs, as he said, like a poor man made of stone. A former poacher in the woods and streams, often arrested and sentenced, he had finally caught cold from his long watches, when he lay in the wet grass, and from his nocturnal fishing in the rivers, when he waded waist-deep in the water. Now he whined and crawled about like a crab that has lost several claws. He crept along, dragging his right leg behind him on the ground like a rag, and the left raised and

doubled in two. But the country boys, when they were running about in the dark after girls or after hares, declared that they caught sight of Clovis, swift-footed as a deer and supple as an adder, in the thickets and in the glades, and that his rheumatism was simply a "trick on the gendarmes." Colosse especially obstinately insisted that he had seen him not once, but fifty times, setting traps, with his crutches under his arm.

Père Oriol paused in front of the old vagabond, and was struck by an idea that was still dimly outlined in his mind; for thoughts grew slowly in his great square head, characteristic of the people of Auvergne.

He said good-morning and the other answered. Then they spoke of the weather, the flowering vines, and of several other matters; but, as tall Colosse had gone on, his father hastened after him.

Their spring was still flowing. It was now clear, and all the bottom of the hole was red, a beautiful shade of dark red, caused by an abundant deposit of iron.

The two men exchanged a smile; then they began to clear up the surroundings of the spring, and to take away the stones, which they piled in a heap. Then they found the last remains of the dead dog, and buried it with mock ceremony. Suddenly the older Oriol let fall his shovel. A crafty smile of joy and triumph furrowed the ends of his straight lips and the corners of his sly eyes. He said to his son: "Come along with me and see something." The son obeyed, and they regained the road and retraced their steps. Père Clovis was still warming himself and his crutches in the sun.

Oriol stopped opposite him and asked:

"Would you like to earn a hundred-franc piece?"

The fellow cautiously made no answer.

The peasant repeated:

"Hey, a hundred francs?"

Then the vagabond changed his mind and muttered:

"Of course, but what am I to do for it?"

"Well, father, this is what you must do." And he told him at great length, beating about the bush, and with innumerable repetitions, that if he would consent to bathe for an hour every day from ten to eleven o'clock, in a hole that Oriol and Colosse would dig beside the spring, and be cured at the end of a month, they would give him a hundred francs in cash.

The paralytic listened with a stupid look, then he said:

"*Sacré!* all the drugs couldn't cure me; your spring won't be able to."

At this Colosse grew suddenly angry, and shouted:

"See here, you old fraud, you know that I know all about that disease of yours; no one can tell me anything about it. What were you doing last Monday in the Comberombe woods at eleven o'clock at night?"

The old man cried hastily:

"It's not true."

"Not true, you old rascal, that you jumped over the ditch to Jean Mannezat, and that you went off through the Poulin ravine?"

The other repeated emphatically:

"It's not true!"

"Not true that I shouted to you, 'Oh, hey! Clovis, the gendarmes,' and that you turned down the Moulinet road?"

"No, it's not true."

Tall Jacques, furious, almost threateningly cried:

"Ah! It's not true! All right, old three paws, listen: whenever I see you again in the woods at night or in the water, I'll grab you, seeing I have much longer legs, and I'll tie you to a tree till morning, when we will all go to arrest you, the whole village with us."

Here Père Oriol stopped his son, and then said pleasantly:

"Listen, Clovis, you can easily try the scheme! We will make a bath for you, Coloche and I, and you will come here to bathe every day for a month. For that I will give you not only a hundred, but two hundred francs. And then, listen! If you are cured when the month is over, there will be five hundred more. Just think of it, five hundred in cash plus two hundred, that makes seven hundred.

"So it will be two hundred for the baths during the month, plus five hundred for the cure. And then—listen to me; the pain may return. Suppose it should come back in the autumn; we can't help that, the water will have cured you once all the same."

This time the old rascal calmly answered:

"In that case I am willing. If it doesn't succeed we shall have tried it anyway."

Then the three men shook hands to seal the bargain, after which the Oriols went back to their spring to dig the bath for Père Clovis.

They had been working for a quarter of an hour when they heard voices on the road.

It was Andermatt and Dr. Latonne. The peasants winked at one another and stopped digging in the ground.

The banker came up and shook hands; then all four began to watch the water without saying a word.

It stirred as if it were boiling over a hot fire, throwing up bubbles of gas; then it flowed away towards the brook by a little trench that it had already cut. Oriol, with a smile of pride on his lips, suddenly said:

"Hey! there's some iron there, isn't there?"

For all the bottom was already red, and even the little pebbles that were washed by the overflow seemed covered with a sort of purplish incrustation.

Dr. Latonne replied:

"Yes, but that doesn't count for much. We must know its other properties."

The peasant observed:

"Coloche and I both drank a glass last evening, and our bodies already feel refreshed. Isn't that true, son?"

The big fellow answered in a convincing tone:

"For sure, it refreshed us greatly."

Andermatt was standing stock still with his feet on the edge of the hole. He turned towards the doctor.

"We would need about six times this volume of water to do what I want to; isn't that so?"

"Yes, about that."

"Do you think we could get it?"

"Oh! I know nothing about it."

"Now, the purchase of the land could not be definitely made until after the borings. First we should require a promise of sale, signed before a notary, as soon as the analysis is known, but not to go into effect, unless the consecutive borings give the results hoped for."

Père Oriol grew anxious. He did not

understand all this. Andermatt then explained to him that one spring was insufficient, that he could not clinch the purchase, unless more were found; but that he could not look for other springs, until after the promise to sell had been signed.

Thereupon the two peasants seemed sure that their fields were as full of springs as of vine-stalks. All that was necessary was to dig for them. They would see, they would see.

Andermatt said simply:

"Yes, we shall see."

Then Père Oriol dipped his hand into the water and exclaimed:

"Why, it's hot enough to boil an egg, much warmer than Bonnefille's."

Latonne in his turn moistened his finger, and acknowledged that this was possible.

The peasant continued:

"Then it has more taste and a better flavor; it hasn't an unpleasant smell like the other. Oh! this one here I warrant is a good one. I have known them all, the mineral waters of the country, for the fifty years that I have watched them flow. I have never seen a finer—never, never!"

He was silent for some seconds, then continued:

"It's not to boast of the water that I say this! Surely no. I would like to make a test of it before you, a real trial, not a chemist's test, but a trial on a sick man. I'll wager that it would cure a paralytic, this spring here, it's so warm and pleasant to taste. I'll make a bet on it."

He seemed to be trying to think up something, then he looked up to the neighboring hill-tops as though to see if he could not find the wished for paralytic. When he did not discover him there, he lowered his eyes to the road.

At a distance of two hundred meters they saw on the roadside the two helpless legs of the vagabond whose body was hidden by the trunk of a willow.

Oriol put his hand to his forehead to shade his eyes, and asked his son:

"That's not Père Clovis still sitting there?"

Colosse answered, laughing:

"Yes, yes. It's he—he isn't as swift as a hare."

Then Père Oriol took a step nearer Andermatt and said in a serious and convincing tone:

"Now, monsieur, listen. There is a man over there, a paralytic that the doctor knows well, a real case, no one has seen him take a step for ten years. Isn't that so, doctor?"

Latonne returned:

"Oh! that fellow there; if you can cure him, I will pay a franc a glass for your mineral water."

Then turning to Andermatt, he said:

"It's an old man with rheumatic gout, affected with a sort of spasmodic contraction of the left leg and with complete paralysis of the right; in fact, I think, an incurable."

Oriol let him finish; then he continued, slowly:

"Very well, doctor, will you make a trial of the water on him for one month? I do not say it will succeed, I promise nothing, I only ask to have the trial made. Now, Coloche and I were going to dig a hole for the stones, but instead we will make a hole for Clovis. He will spend an hour every morning in it and then we shall see, we shall see!"

The doctor muttered:

"You can try. I assure you that you won't succeed."

But Andermatt, attracted by the hope of effecting a cure that would be almost miraculous, gladly accepted the peasant's proposition; and all four turned back to where the vagabond was still sitting motionless in the sunshine.

The old poacher, seeing through the ruse, pretended to refuse, objecting for a long time; then at last he allowed himself to be persuaded, on condition that Andermatt would give him two francs a day for the hour he should spend in the water.

So the matter was arranged. It was even decided that as soon as the hole was dug, Père Clovis should take his first bath that very day. Andermatt would supply him later with clothes, and the two Oriols would bring an old shepherd's hut that was out in their yard, where the invalid could retire to change his garments.

Then the banker and the doctor went back to the village. On entering it they separated, one going home for consultations, the other to wait for his wife, who was to go to the bathing establishment at about half-past nine o'clock.

She appeared almost immediately. All dressed in pink from head to foot, a pink hat, pink parasol, and a rosy face, she looked like Aurora, and as she went down the steps of the hotel to avoid the curve of the road, she tripped along with the lightness of a bird hopping from stone to stone without spreading its wings. She called as soon as she saw her husband:

"Oh! this beautiful place. I am so happy."

The scattered bathers, who were walking in serious mood in the lonely little park, turned as she passed; and Petrus Martel, who was smoking his pipe in his shirt-sleeves at the window of the billiard-hall, called to his crony, Lepalme, and said, smacking his lips:

"By gosh, there's a sugar-plum!"

Christiane entered the building, greeted with a smile the bookkeeper, who was sitting at the left of the doorway, and with a good-morning the former jailer sitting at the right. Then handing a ticket to a woman attendant dressed like the one in the refreshment room, she followed her down a corridor upon which the doors of the bathrooms opened. The attendant showed her into one of these, which was quite large with bare walls. It was furnished with a chair, a mirror, and a shoe-horn, while a great oval basin, coated with yellow cement like the floor, served as a bath.

The attendant turned a cock like those that open the street hydrants, and the water gushed up through a little round, grated opening in the bottom of the basin, which was soon filled nearly to the brim. The overflow escaped by a little gutter sunk into the wall.

Christiane, who had left her maid at the hotel, declined the assistance of the attendant, saying she would ring if she needed anything.

She disrobed slowly, watching as she did so the almost imperceptible motion of the water stirring in the clear basin. Then she dipped her foot in, and a delicious feeling of warmth rose to her very throat; then she stepped into the tepid water, and sat down in its soothing warmth, in this transparent bath, in the spring that flowed around her, covering her body with little bubbles of gas.

And she felt so happy there in the

water, so gently, so softly, so deliciously caressed, clasped by the moving water, the living water, the water quickened from the spring that gushed up from the depths of the basin and fled away through the little hole in the edge of the bath, that she would have liked to stay there forever, without a movement, almost without a thought. A feeling of calm happiness, born of repose and comfort, of peaceful thoughts, of health, of quiet joy and silent gayety, pervaded her with the exquisite warmth of this bath.

No desire agitated her soul, calm as her heart in this tepid water—no desire save a vague wish for a child—no desire for any other life, of emotion or of passion. She felt comfortable, happy, and contented.

She was startled—some one opened the door—it was the attendant bringing her linen. The twenty minutes had passed, and it was already time to dress. This call was a pang, almost a misfortune. She wanted to ask the woman to let her stay in a few minutes longer. Then she remembered that she would have this same enjoyment every day, and she left the water with regret, to wrap herself in a bathrobe that felt unpleasantly warm.

As she was passing, Dr. Bonnefille opened the door of his office and, with a ceremonious bow, asked her in. He asked after her health, felt her pulse, looked at her tongue, questioned her as to her appetite, digestion and sleeping. Then he led her to the office door, saying:

"Come, come, that's well. My regards, if you please, to your father, who is one of the most distinguished men that I have met in my career."

At last she escaped, bored by this attention, and in front of the door she saw the marquis, who was talking with Andermatt, Gontran, and Paul Brétigny.

Her husband, in whose head every new idea buzzed ceaselessly like a fly in a bottle, was telling the story of the paralytic, and he wanted to go back to see if the vagabond was taking his bath.

They went there to please him.

But on the way, Christiane very quietly drew back, and when they were a little behind the others, said:

"Tell me—for I want to talk to you about your friend, he isn't very attractive to me, I must say—tell me what he is really like."

Then Gontran, who had known Paul for several years, described his nature, which by moods was passionate, surly, sincere, and kind.

He was, Gontran said, a clever fellow, whose sudden enthusiasm threw him impetuously into every new idea. Yielding to his impulses without knowing how to govern or direct them, or how to overcome feeling by reason, or how to rule his life according to any system based on convictions that he had thought out, he obeyed his impulses, whether they were excellent or vicious, the moment that a desire, a thought, or any feeling whatever, stirred his high-strung nature.

He had already fought seven duels, for he was as quick to insult people as he was afterwards ready to become their friend. He had been madly in love with women of all classes. They were adored with the same transports, from the shop-girl, picked up on the threshold of her store, to the actress that he carried off—yes, carried off—the eve-

ning of a first performance. As she was stepping into her carriage to return home, she was borne away in his arms, in the midst of the astounded spectators, and thrown into another carriage, which disappeared at a gallop before anyone could follow or overtake it.

And Gontran added:

"So you see, he is a good fellow, but a madcap. Then, too, he is very rich, and is capable of doing anything—anything at all—when he loses his head."

Christiane resumed:

"What a strange perfume he uses! What is it?"

Gontran answered:

"I don't know at all; he doesn't want to tell. I think it came from Russia. It was the actress, his actress, of whom I am now curing him, who gave it to him. Yes, indeed, it is a delicious fragrance."

They saw on the road a crowd of bathers and peasants, for it was customary every morning before lunch to take a stroll along this road.

Christiane and Gontran rejoined the marquis, Andermatt and Paul, and they soon beheld, on the very spot where only the day before the great rock had stood, a human head. It was a queer-looking head, decked in a ragged felt hat and wearing a long white beard. It rose out of the ground like a decapitated head. One might think it had grown there like a plant. The vine-growers circling round were staring at it, amazed, impassive, for the peasants of Auvergne never jest, though three fat gentlemen, guests of the second-class hotels, were laughing and joking.

Oriol and his son stood watching the vagabond, who was steeping in his hole, sitting on a stone with the water up to his chin. One might have thought that it was a criminal of olden times, sentenced to death for some strange crime of witchcraft. He had not even left his crutches behind, and they were bathed in the water beside him.

Andermatt, delighted, kept shouting:

"Bravo! Bravo! here's an example that all the people in the country suffering from rheumatic pains ought to follow."

Then, leaning towards the old fellow, he shouted as if the man were deaf:

"Are you all right?"

The man, who seemed completely stupefied by the almost boiling water, replied:

"I feel as if I were melting. *Sacré!* but it's hot!" Then Père Oriol exclaimed:

"The hotter it is, the more good it will do him."

A voice inquired behind the marquis:

"What in the world is going on?"

And M. Aubry-Pasteur, panting as usual, stopped on his return from his daily walk.

Then Andermatt explained about the projected cure.

But the old fellow kept repeating:

"*Sacré,* how hot it is!"

And he wanted to get out, asking for help to pull him from the water.

The banker finally succeeded in calming him by a promise of twenty sous extra per bath.

The people formed a circle around the hole in which the grayish rags that covered the old body were soaking.

A voice called out:

"What queer meat! I would not make soup of it!"

Another rejoined:

"The meat would scarcely suit me either!"

But the marquis remarked that the bubbles of carbonic acid gas seemed more abundant, larger, and more active in this new spring than in that of the baths.

The rags of the vagabond were covered with them, and they rose to the surface in such numbers that the water seemed traversed by countless little chains, by an infinite number of rosaries formed of tiny, round diamonds, for the bright sunshine of the open sky made them as transparent as gems.

Then Aubry-Pasteur burst out laughing.

"Parbleu!" said he, "let me tell you how they do at the bathing establishment. You know, they catch a spring like a bird in a snare, or rather in a bell. That's what they call coaxing it. Well, last year this is what happened to the spring that supplies the baths. The carbonic-acid gas, being lighter than water, accumulated in the top of the bell. Then, when it had collected there in a very large amount, it was forced along the conduits, rose in quantity in the baths, filled the bathrooms, and suffocated the patients. There were three accidents from this cause in two months. Then they consulted me again, and I invented a very simple apparatus, which consisted of two pipes that carried the water and the gas separately from the bell and then mingled them again directly under the bath, thus restoring to the water its normal quantity of gas, but avoiding a dangerous surplus. But my apparatus would have cost a thousand francs. So what do you suppose the superintendent did then? You may have a thousand guesses. He bored a hole in the bell to get rid of the gas, which escapes in a hurry, I can tell you. As a result they now sell you carbonated baths without carbonates, or at least with so little that it doesn't amount to anything. But just see what there is here."

Everyone was indignant. They ceased to laugh, and looked with envy at the paralytic. Each bather would gladly have shouldered a pickaxe to dig a hole for himself alongside of the vagabond's.

Then Andermatt took the engineer by the arm, and the two sauntered away talking together. From time to time Aubry-Pasteur would stop and draw a diagram with his cane, indicating various points, and the banker would make notes in his notebook.

Christiane and Paul Brétigny began to talk together. He told her about his tour in Auvergne, what he had seen and his impressions. He loved the country with his ardent nature, for there the soul is constantly filled with sensuous pleasure. He loved this delight of the senses that it awoke in him, making every nerve and sinew tingle.

He said:

"With me, madame, it seems as if I were open to every impression, and everything flows in and pervades me, making me weep or gnash my teeth. When I look at that hill facing us, that great green fold, that nation of trees scaling the mountain, I feel all the forest in my eyes, it penetrates, pervades me, flows in my blood. It seems as if I devoured it and it filled my being—I become myself a forest."

He laughed as he told this, and cast

his large, round eyes now on the forest and again on Christiane, and she, surprised, astonished, but very impressionable, felt as though she also were devoured like the forest by this wide-seeing, eager glance.

Paul continued:

"And if you only knew what delights I owe to my sense of smell! I drink in this air, I am intoxicated with it, I live in it, and I can distinguish every fragrance in it. Listen, I will tell you. First, have you noticed, since you have been here, a delicious fragrance, to which no other can be compared, so delicate is it, so light, that it seems almost—how shall I say—an immaterial essence? One recognizes it at every turn, intangible, impossible to tell whence it comes. Never, never has anything more—more divine stirred my soul. Well, it is the fragrance of the vines in bloom! Ah! I was four whole days discovering whence it came. And isn't it a charming thought, madame, that the vine that gives us wine, wine which only finer spirits can appreciate and enjoy, gives us also the most delicate and exciting of perfumes, which only those of the highest sensibility can discern? And then do you detect also the heavy fragrance of the chestnut trees, the sweet odor of the acacias, of the aromatic mountain herbs, and the grass, the grass that smells so sweet, so sweet?—and yet no one notices it."

She was astonished to hear such things; not that they were surprising, but they seemed of such a different character from those that daily surrounded her, that her mind remained impressed, stirred, excited.

He talked on, his voice a trifle dull in tone but warm.

"And then, stay, do you not also perceive in the air, on the roads when the sun is warm, a slight odor of vanilla? Yes, you do? Well, that's—but I dare not tell you."

He laughed aloud, and suddenly stretching his hand before him, said: "Look!"

A line of wagons loaded with hay were coming, drawn by cows yoked two by two. The slow beasts, their heads bowed beneath the yoke, and their horns bound to a wooden bar, crept painfully along, and one could see the movement of the bones of the legs through the skin. In front of each team a man in shirt-sleeves, wearing a waistcoat and a black hat, walked along with a switch in his hand, regulating the pace of the animals. From time to time he turned, and without ever striking them, he touched the shoulder or forehead of a cow, which then blinked its great, vague-looking eyes and obeyed his gesture.

Christiane and Paul stepped aside to let them pass.

He asked her:

"Do you perceive it?"

She was astonished.

"What do you mean? That smells of the stable."

"Yes, that smells of the stable, and all these cows that pass along the road—for there are no horses in all this region—scatter along the roads this smell of the stable, which, mingled with the fine dust, gives to the breeze an odor of vanilla."

Christiane, a little disgusted, murmured:

"Oh!"

He resumed:

"Permit me, for just now I am analyz-

ing like a pharmacist. At any rate, madame, we are in the most alluring, the softest, and most restful country that I have ever seen—a country of the golden age. And Limagne—oh! Limagne! But I won't tell you about it, I want to show it to you. You will see it yourself."

The marquis and Gontran rejoined them. The marquis took his daughter's arm in his, and, as he turned her to retrace their steps for lunch, he said:

"Listen, children, this concerns all three of you. William, who goes crazy when he has an idea in his head, now dreams of nothing but his town that he is going to build, and he is anxious to win over the Oriol family. So he wants Christiane to make the acquaintance of the girls to see if they are at all possible. But their father mustn't suspect our plan. Then I had the happy idea of a charity fête. You, my daughter, shall call on the curé, then with him you will choose two of his parishioners to make collections with you. You know which ones you are to have him choose, but he will undertake to invite them. As for you, boys, you are to arrange a lottery game at the casino. Petrus Martel with his actors and musicians will help you. And if the little Oriol girls are attractive, for they are said to have been very well educated at their convent, Christiane will win them over."

CHAPTER V

SETTING THE BAIT

For eight days, Christiane did nothing but prepare for the fête. The curé, as had been predicted, found among his parishioners only the Oriol girls who were worthy of making collections with the daughter of the Marquis of Ravenel, and pleased at this chance of putting himself forward, the curé had taken all the required steps, organized and arranged everything, and had himself invited the young girls, as though he had originated the idea.

The parish was excited, and the mournful bathers found a new topic of conversation at table in making various estimates of the possible receipts of the two gatherings, sacred and profane.

The day promised well. It was a splendid summer weather, warm and clear, brilliant sunshine on the plain and delicious shade under the village trees.

Mass was at nine o'clock—a short musical service. Christiane, who had come before to cast a glance at the decorations, which were made of garlands of flowers from Royat and Clermont-Ferrand, heard steps behind her. It was the curé, Abbé Litre, accompanied by the Oriol girls. He introduced them to Christiane, who at once asked the girls to lunch. They accepted with blushes and courtesies.

The three ladies sat on three seats of honor, placed for them next to the choir, opposite three seats occupied by

the young men who had been chosen to accompany the ladies who were collecting. They were dressed in their Sunday clothes, and were the sons of the mayor, of the deputy mayor and of the municipal judge, and had been selected out of compliment to the town authorities.

Everything went off very well.

The service was short. The collection amounted to a hundred and ten francs. To this was added five hundred contributed by Andermatt, fifty by the marquis, and a hundred by Paul Brétigny, making a total of seven hundred and sixty francs—something hitherto unheard of in the parish of Enval.

After service they took the Oriol girls to the hotel. They seemed a little timid, but not at all awkward, and though they did not say much, it was more through modesty than fear. They had a *table d'hôte* luncheon and pleased the men—all of the men.

The older girl was more serious, the younger more vivacious, the older more conventional, the younger more gracious, yet they resembled one another as closely as any two sisters could.

The moment the meal was finished, they went to the casino for the lottery-drawing, which was set for two o'clock.

The park, which was now thronged with patients and peasants mingled, looked like the scene of some travelling fair.

In their Chinese kiosk, the band was playing a rural symphony, an original composition of Saint-Landri himself. Paul, who was walking with Christiane, stood still.

"Listen," he said, "that's beautiful. He has talent, that fellow. With an orchestra that would be fine."

Then he asked:

"Are you fond of music, madame?"

"Very."

"As for me, music overcomes me. When I hear a composition that I like, it seems to me first that the opening strains raise my skin from my flesh, melt it, dissolve it, cause it to vanish, and leave me like one flayed alive, under the attacks of all the instruments. It is on my nerves that the orchestra plays, my bared and quivering nerves, that start at each note. I hear the music not only with my ears, but with all the power of feeling of my whole body, which quivers from head to foot. Nothing gives me such pleasure, or rather such happiness."

She smiled, saying:

"You feel keenly."

"*Parbleu!* what is the use of living if one doesn't feel keenly? I do not envy at all those people whose hearts are encased as in a turtle shell or in a hippopotamus hide. They alone are happy who suffer through their sensations, which come like shocks, and which they enjoy as they would dainties. For we must plan all our emotions, happy or sad, and satiate ourselves, intoxicate ourselves, to a point of the keenest pleasure, or to the deepest distress."

She raised her eyes to look at him, a trifle surprised, just as she had been eight days ago, by what he said.

Indeed, for the past eight days, this new friend—for he had soon become a friend in spite of her first dislike—disturbed the tranquillity of her soul and agitated it as one stirs a pool by casting in stones. And he cast stones, great stones, into that soul still dormant.

Christiane's father, like all fathers,

had always treated her as a little girl, to whom one should not tell anything of importance; her brother had made her laugh, but never think; her husband never dreamed that one should speak of anything to one's wife outside of common, practical interests. So up to this time she had lived in a sweet, contented torpor of soul.

This stranger broke upon the gates of her understanding with the shock of ideas that fell like blows of an axe. He was, besides, one of those men that please women with his sensitive nature and the extreme acuteness of his emotions. He knew how to talk to them, to make them understand everything. He was incapable of sustained effort; but very brilliant. He loved or hated passionately, espousing every cause with the ardor of a man fanatically convinced, but he was as changeable as enthusiastic. Thus he had to a marked degree the true feminine temperament, the credulity, the charm, the mobility, the high-strung nature, combined with the stronger, more active, more receptive, and clearer intellect of a man.

Gontran suddenly rejoined them.

"Turn round," he said, "and look at the Honorat household."

They looked back and saw Dr. Honorat with a fat old lady walking by his side. She was arrayed in a blue dress, and her head looked like a nursery garden, for all the species of plants and flowers were gathered together on her hat.

Christiane, astonished, exclaimed:

"Is that his wife? Why, she is fifteen years older than he!"

"Yes, she's sixty-five. She was an old nurse that he fell in love with between two cases. The household seems to be one of those where they are quarrelling from morning till night."

They went back to the casino, attracted there by the shouts of the crowd. On a large table in front of the building the lottery prizes were exhibited. Petrus Martel, assisted by Mlle. Odelin of the Odéon, a little brunette, drew and called the numbers, announcing them with the antics of a mountebank, which greatly amused the crowd. The marquis, accompanied by the Oriol girls and Andermatt, then reappeared and said:

"Shall we stay here? It is so noisy."

Then it was decided that they should take a walk on the road half-way up the hill that leads from Enval to Roche-Pradière.

To reach it, they climbed up one behind the other along a footpath through the vineyards. Christiane took the lead with an easy, quick step. Since she had come to this part of the country she seemed to live a new life, with a keenness of enjoyment and a vitality that she had not before known. Perhaps the baths improved her health, perhaps she simply felt animated and inspired by the presence and the ardent spirit of this almost unknown youth who was teaching her to understand.

She took long, deep breaths, as she thought of all he had said about the sweet odors that are borne along by the wind. "It's true," she thought, "that he has taught me to enjoy the fragrance of the air." And she found again all those sweet perfumes, above all that of the vine, which is so light, so delicate, so elusive.

She reached the road, and then they walked in groups. Andermatt and Louise Oriol, the older sister, took the lead,

and talked about the yield of the fields of Auvergne. She knew well, this girl of Auvergne, as the true child of her father, endowed with an hereditary instinct, all the practical details of agriculture. She told them in her modest voice in a refined tone, with the cultivated pronunciation that she had been taught at the convent.

As he listened, he watched her with side-glances, and thought that this serious young girl, who was already so well informed, was charming. Now and then he exclaimed, somewhat surprised:

"What! Land is worth thirty thousand francs per hectare in Limagne?"

"Yes, monsieur, when it is planted in fine orchards that yield apples used for dessert. It is our part of the country that supplies nearly all the fruit that is used in Paris."

Then he turned back to look with interest on Limagne. From the road on which they were one could see, stretching further than the eye could reach, the vast plain, veiled in a blue haze.

Christiane and Paul also paused facing this vast, veiled expanse of country, so charming to the eye that they might have stayed forever gazing at it.

The road was now sheltered by great walnut trees, whose dense shadows made a grateful coolness. It now no longer ascended, but wound along halfway up on the hillside, which below was carpeted with vines, and above the mown grass crept up to the very rim of the low crest.

Paul murmured:

"Isn't it lovely? Tell me, isn't it splendid? And why is it that this landscape so affects me? Yes, why? It radiates a charm so deep, so wide, so all-inclusive, that it touches me to the heart. It seems, does it not, in looking over this plain, that the wings of the soul are unfurled? And it takes flight and soars, it fades away and vanishes there, in the greater distance, towards those dreamlands that we shall never see. Yes, this landscape is so alluring because it looks like a dream rather than a reality."

She listened silently, waiting, hoping, welcoming every word, and she was touched without well knowing why. For she, too, had caught glimpses of other countries, of far-off lands, veiled in blue and rosy haze—improbable and wonderful—never found, yet ever sought, which make all other countries seem commonplace.

He resumed:

"Yes, it is beautiful, because it is beautiful. Other horizons are more striking, but less full of harmony. Ah! madame, beauty, harmonious beauty. There is nothing else in the world. Nothing exists but beauty. But how few comprehend it! The lines of a figure, or of a mountain, the color of a painting or of that plain, the indescribable something of the Joconda, a saying that goes to your soul—this something which makes an artist also a creator with God, which distinguishes him among men.

"Hark, I will recite to you two verses of Baudelaire."

And he declaimed:

From heaven or hell, I care not whence thou comest,
O Beauty, grand, terrific, simply true,
If but thy smile, thy foot, unclose the door
Of spheres unlimited I loved, but never knew.

From God or Satan, angel, siren be it,
If thou but render—velvet-eyed fay of rhythm,
Of perfume, radiance—O, my only queen—
This world less desolate, my life less drear!

At this Christiane gazed at him, marvelling at his poetic enthusiasm, questioning him with her eyes, and not understanding what strange meaning might lie in this poetry.

He divined her thought, and was vexed at not having succeeded in communicating his poetic exaltation to her; for he had recited these verses very well indeed, and he resumed with a shade of scorn:

"I am a fool to try to force you to enjoy a poet of such subtle inspiration. But a day will come, I hope, when you will feel all these things as I do. Women, who are endowed with much greater intuition than intelligence, do not grasp the hidden and veiled suggestions of art, unless a sympathetic appeal is first made to their minds."

And, bowing to her, he added:

"I will strive to make this appeal, madame, to your sympathies."

She did not think him impertinent, but peculiar. She had even given up trying to understand any more, for she was suddenly struck by his appearance which she had not noticed before. He was quite a dandy, but was so tall and broad, with such a manly look, that one did not notice at first with what studied elegance he was dressed.

Then there was something crude about his face that gave to his entire person a slightly heavy look at first glance. But when one became familiar with his features, one found in them a charm—a charm fierce and strong—which at moments became very sweet, in harmony with the soft tones of his voice, which always seemed a little veiled.

Christiane reflected, as she noticed for the first time how well-groomed he was from head to foot: "Surely this is the sort of man whose attractions one must discover one by one."

Gontran ran up to join them. He shouted:

"Sister, oh, Christiane! Wait for me."

And when he had caught up to them, he said, still laughing:

"Oh! do come and listen to the little Oriol girl. She is as entertaining as she can be; she is wonderfully witty. Papa has finally made her feel at ease, and she is telling us the funniest things in the world. Just wait and hear them."

So they waited for the marquis, who was coming with the younger of the girls, Charlotte Oriol.

She was cleverly telling with child-like liveliness stories of the village, and describing the simplicity and shrewd humor of the peasants. And she took off their gestures, their slow gait, their grave words, their "fouchtra," their countless repetitions of "bougrrre," which she pronounced "bigrrre," mimicking all their facial expressions in a way that made her lively, pretty face altogether charming. Her sparkling eyes danced; her mouth, which was a little large, opened so as to show her fine white teeth; her nose, a little retroussé, gave her a piquante look; and she was so fresh, with a flower's freshness that one longed to kiss her.

The marquis, who had passed nearly all his life on his own estate, and Chris-

tiane and Gontran—who had been brought up in the family château among the proud, tall Norman farmers who, according to custom, were sometimes invited to meals, and whose children, with whom Gontran and Christiane took their first communion, were treated with familiarity—knew exactly how to talk to this little country girl, already three-quarters a woman of the world, with a friendly frankness, a cordiality and sincerity, that awoke in her at once a gay, trusting confidence.

Andermatt and Louise returned, for they had gone as far as the village, and did not care to walk through it.

Then they all sat down by a grassy ditch, at the foot of a tree.

They stayed there a long time, talking with languid ease about everything and nothing. Sometimes a cart passed, always drawn by two cows with their heads bowed and swaying under the yoke. They were always driven by a lean peasant in a large black hat, who directed the animals by touches with the end of his slender switch with the motions of an orchestra leader.

The man would take off his hat and bow to the Oriol girls, and they would reply by a kind "Good day!" in their fresh young voices.

Finally, as it began to grow late, they returned home.

When they reached the park, Charlotte Oriol exclaimed:

"Oh! the bourrée! the bourrée!"

And they were really dancing the bourrée to the strains of an old air of Auvergne.

The peasants, men and women, were treading the measures, skipping and courtesying, turning and bowing, the women holding their skirts with two fingers of each hand, while the men kept their arms swinging or curved like jug-handles.

The monotonous and pleasing melody danced too, in the cool breeze of evening. It was always the same tune with the very high notes played by the violin, while the rhythm was accentuated by the other instruments to make the pace of the dance more tripping. It was simple peasant music, sprightly and unstudied, that just suited this awkward, rustic minuet.

The bathers, too, joined the dance. Petrus Martel was hopping about opposite to the little Odelin girl, who affected the graces of a ballet-dancer, and the comic actor Lepalme mimicked a fantastic step around the cashier of the casino, who seemed agitated by memories of Bullier.

But suddenly Gontran saw Dr. Honorat, who had thrown himself into the dance with all his heart and soul. He was dancing the classic bourrée like a true-born son of Auvergne.

The orchestra was silent. All stopped dancing, and the doctor came up to speak to the marquis.

He wiped his brow and panted.

"It's fine," he said, "to be young sometimes."

Gontran put his hand on the doctor's shoulder, and smiling mischievously said:

"You never told me that you were married."

The doctor stopped mopping his forehead, and replied gravely:

"Yes, I am, and badly."

"What did you say?"

"I say badly married. Never commit such a folly as that, young man."

"Why?"

"Why? Well, listen. I have been married for twenty years, and I am not yet accustomed to it. Every evening when I go home I reflect: 'Oh, that old lady is still at my house! Will she never go?'"

Everyone began to laugh, his expression was so serious and convincing.

But the bells of the hotel were ringing for dinner. The fête was over. They escorted Louise and Charlotte Oriol to their father's house, and when they had left the girls, they talked about them.

Everyone thought them charming, but Andermatt was the only one who preferred the older sister. The marquis said:

"How readily the feminine character can be molded! The mere proximity of their father's money, of which they hardly even know the use, has made ladies out of these country girls."

Then Christiane asked Paul Brétigny:

"And you, which do you like best?"

He answered:

"Oh, I—I did not even look at them. It is not they whom I like best."

He spoke very low and she made no reply.

CHAPTER VI

PLAYING WITH FIRE

The days that followed were delightful for Christiane Andermatt. She was full of life, her heart light and her soul full of joy. The morning bath was her first pleasure, a delicious pleasure that made the skin tingle, an exquisitely refreshing half-hour in the warm, flowing water that made her feel happy till night. Indeed, she was happy in all her thoughts and all her desires. The affection with which she felt herself surrounded and pervaded, the intoxication of youth that throbbed in her veins, and then this new environment, this splendid country made for restful dreams and repose, deep and sweet, that embraced her like a great caress of nature, awoke in her new emotions. Everything that came near her, everything that touched her, was a continuation of the sensation of the morning —the sensation of a warm bath, a great bath of happiness in which she was plunged.

Andermatt, who had to leave Enval for a fortnight or two, had returned to Paris. He admonished his wife to watch carefully to see that the paralytic did not omit his treatment.

So every day before lunch, Christiane, with her father, her brother, and Paul went to see what Gontran called, "the poor man's soup." Other bathers went, too, and made a circle round the hole as they talked to the vagabond.

He could not walk any better, he said, but he felt as if his legs were full of ants. He described how these ants ran up and down from his thighs to the ends of his toes. He felt them even at night, these tormenting creatures, tickling and

biting him so that he could not sleep.

The strangers and the peasants were divided into two parties, the credulous and the incredulous, and were deeply interested in the cure.

After lunch, Christiane often went to call for the Oriol girls, to take them for a walk. They were the only women at the resort with whom she could talk and be on intimate terms, with whom she could exchange friendly confidences, and from whom she could ask a little feminine affection. She was at once attracted by the serious yet kindly good sense of the older sister, and even more by the shrewd, droll humor of the younger. And now she sought the friendship of the two girls, not so much to please her husband as to gratify herself.

They went on excursions, sometimes in an ancient six-seated landau, that had been used as a stage, which they found in a livery at Riom, and sometimes on foot.

They were particularly fond of a wild little valley near Châtel-Guyon that led to the Sans-Souci hermitage.

They walked two by two, chatting as they sauntered slowly along the narrow path, under the fir trees that bordered the brook. At all the fords—for the brook constantly wound back and forth across the footpath—Paul and Gontran stood on stones in the stream, and taking the ladies by the arm, helped them to spring across. Each time this happened they walked with different members of the party.

So Christiane was first with one, then with another, but managed every time to stay alone with Paul Brétigny, either in advance of or behind the rest of the party. His manner towards her had changed since the first days of their acquaintance. He laughed less, was less blunt, and not such a good comrade, but more respectful and attentive.

Yet their conversation grew more intimate, and questions of the affections had the foremost place. He talked of sentiment and love as a man well versed in those subjects, who had sounded to the depths the tender affection of women, and who, through them, had experienced as much joy as sorrow.

She was delighted and a little touched, and led him on to make these confidences through a burning and wily curiosity. All she had learned of him had aroused in her a keen desire to know more, to penetrate mentally into the life of one of these intense men of whom she had caught glimpses only in books, one of those beings filled with the tempests and mysteries of love.

Encouraged thus by her, he told her every day a little more of his life, of his adventures and his sorrows, with a warmth of expression that his burning memories often made passionate, and his desire to please fascinating.

He disclosed before her eyes an unknown world. He found the most eloquent words to describe the various shades of emotion, the effects of growing hopes, the sacredness of flowers and bits of ribbon, of all these little cherished objects, the unnerving effect of sudden doubts, the agony of alarming conjectures, the tortures of jealousy, and the indescribable intoxication of the first kiss.

All these thrilling and familiar chats, which were renewed and prolonged every day, fell like seeds cast on the ground on Christiane's heart. And the charm of the wide expanse of country, of the

fragrant air, of distant Limagne—blue and so vast that it seemed to make the soul expand—those extinct craters on the mountain, earth's ancient furnaces that served now only to heat the healing waters, the coolness of the shady nooks, the light murmur of the brooks over the stones—all this, too, permeated the body and soul of this young woman, softening them like a gentle, warm rain falling on a virgin soil, that will cause the flowers to grow from seeds sown in the earth.

She realized perfectly that this young fellow was trying to pay court to her, that he thought her pretty, even more than pretty; and the wish to please him led her to try a thousand schemes which were simple and artful at once, to fascinate and make a conquest of him.

When he looked sad, she would leave him suddenly; when she anticipated a tender speech she threw him a glance before the phrase was finished—one of those swift glances of deep meaning that pass like flame to a man's heart.

With pretty speeches, gentle inclinations of her head, dreamy gestures with her hands, and sad looks suddenly brightening into smiles, she showed him without words that his efforts were not lost.

What did she wish? Nothing. What did she expect would result from this? Nothing. She played at this game just because she was a woman, because she did not realize the danger, because she wanted to know what he would do without forecasting it.

And then there suddenly developed in her that inborn coquetry which is latent in the blood of all feminine creatures. The sleeping, artless child of yesterday had suddenly awakened, subtle and discerning, in the presence of this man who talked to her unceasingly of love. She divined the increasing agitation of his thoughts when he was near her, she watched the growing emotion in his glance, and she understood all the different tones of his voice with that peculiar intuition of women who feel that they are loved.

Other men in society had already courted her, but she gave them only the gay mockery of a lively young girl. Their commonplace compliments amused her, their woeful looks and sighs filled her with merriment, and she answered all their show of tenderness with mocking jests.

With this man she felt that she was suddenly face to face with a fascinating and dangerous adversary. She had become then one of those artful creatures, clairvoyant by instinct, armed with boldness and coolness, who as long as their hearts are free, lie in wait for, surprise and entangle men in the invisible net of sentiment.

As far as he was concerned, in the first days of their acquaintance, he had thought her very silly. Accustomed as he was to women who were adventuresses, as well drilled in love as an old soldier is in military manœuvres, skilled in all the wiles of courting and tenderness, he thought this simple heart uninteresting and treated it with a light disdain.

But gradually her very simplicity amused and fascinated him. Yielding to his impressionable nature, he began to surround this young woman with tender attentions.

He knew well that the surest way to stir an innocent soul is to speak constantly of love, while appearing to be

thinking only of others. Then, cunningly encouraging the delicate curiosity that he had aroused in her, he began, under the pretense of confidences in the shade of the woods, to teach her the meaning of love.

He amused himself as she did at this game, showing her by all the little attentions that men know how to employ his growing fondness for her. He posed as a lover without even supposing that he would ever really become one.

They both did all this as naturally on their long, slow walks, as it is natural to bathe on a hot day when one is walking beside a river.

But from the moment that real coquetry developed in Christiane, from the hour that she showed all the inborn wiles of women in fascinating men, when she made up her mind to bring this passionate lover to his knees—as she might have determined to win a game of croquet—this candid libertine let himself be snared by the wiles of this simple creature, and began to love her.

Then he became awkward, restless, nervous, and she played with him as a cat teases a mouse.

With another woman he would have had no hesitation—he would have spoken, and he would have conquered by the vehemence of his passion. But with her he dared not, she seemed so different from all the women he had known.

The others, in fact, were women already scorched by the passions of life, to whom one could say anything, with whom one could venture the boldest appeals, murmuring near their lips the trembling words that turn the blood to flame. He knew his power, and knew that he would triumph when he could communicate freely his passion to the heart and the senses of the woman he loved.

With Christiane, he felt as if he were in the presence of a young girl, so much did he consider her as a novice, and all his resources were paralyzed. And then he loved her dearly, but in a different way as one might a child or a betrothed. He longed for her, yet he feared to touch her, to soil or tarnish her purity. He had no wish to clasp her tightly in his arms like the others, but to kneel before her, to touch her dress with his lips, and to gently kiss, with a chaste and tender slowness the little curls on her temples, the corners of her mouth, and her eyes, her closed eyes in which he could feel the blue of her charming glance wakening under the drooping lid. He would have liked to protect her from everyone and everything, to save her from being elbowed by common people, from seeing repulsive people, and from going among those who were not clean. He would have liked to have taken the mud from the streets that she crossed, the pebbles from the roads, and to have cut the brambles and the branches so as to make everything smooth and dainty around her, and to carry her always so that she should never have to walk. And it irritated him that she had to talk with the other guests at the hotel, and to eat the same food at the dining-table, and to endure all the inevitable little annoyances of life.

He did not know what to say to her, for all his thoughts were of her. His powerlessness to express the feelings of his heart, his inability to express to her his devotion and the pas-

sion that burned in his veins, sometimes gave him the expression of a wild beast in chains, and at the same time he felt a strange desire to burst into sobs.

She saw all this without fully understanding it, and was amused by it with the mischievous delight of coquettes.

When they had lingered behind the rest and she felt that at last he was about to say something disturbing, she would suddenly break into a run and catch up with her father. When she had overtaken him, she would exclaim:

"Suppose we play a game of puss-in-the-corner."

As a rule, games of puss-in-the-corner ended the excursions. The party looked for a glade or a place in the wood where the path widened, and played like urchins out for a walk.

The Oriol girls and Gontran himself took great pleasure in this amusement which satisfied the incessant desire of motion that all young people have. Paul Brétigny was the only one that grumbled, for he was filled with other thoughts. But gradually he would join in the game, showing at last more eagerness than the others, so as to catch Christiane, to touch her, to lay his hand suddenly on her dress or her shoulder.

The marquis, whose careless, listless nature was contented with anything that did not disturb his peace of mind, would sit at the foot of a tree and watch his boarding-school at play, as he said. He found this quiet life very congenial, and thought the whole world perfect.

Yet Christiane soon became frightened at Paul's conduct. One day she was even afraid of him.

They had gone one morning with Gontran to the end of a strange ravine, called the End of the World, where the Enval brook rises.

The gorge, which grows constantly narrower and more winding, forms a cul-de-sac in the mountain. They scrambled over huge blocks of stone, they forded the stream on stones in its bed, and after climbing round a rock more than fifty meters high that forms a barrier across the ravine, they found themselves shut in, in a sort of narrow trench between two gigantic walls of rock, bare to the summit, which was covered with trees and verdure.

The brook there forms a lake shaped like a bowl, and the place is a wild-looking rift in the mountains, strange and unexpected, such as one meets with more often in stories than in nature.

On this particular morning, Paul looked at the great cliff which had seemed an impassable barrier, and declared that it bore marks of having been scaled. He said:

"Look, we can go further."

When with some difficulty he had climbed up the perpendicular wall of rock, he exclaimed:

"Oh! it's charming. A little grove in the water—do come!"

Then, lying down on the rock, he drew Christiane up by both hands, while Gontran guided her and placed her feet on all the slight projections of the rock.

Soil from the summit had washed down and formed on this ledge a wild little garden of shrubs whose rootlets were bathed in the flowing stream.

Their progress was barred a little further on by another ledge which they climbed, and then their way was blocked a third time, and they found themselves at the foot of an impassable wall of

rock over which fell straight and clear, a waterfall, twenty meters high. It plunged into a deep basin that the falls had excavated which was half hidden under bind-weed and branches.

The rift in the mountain had now become so narrow, that the two men, holding each other by the hand, could touch the two sides. One could only see a line of blue sky, one heard only the sound of the falling water. One might easily have fancied it to be one of those undiscoverable retreats in which the Latin poets concealed the nymphs of antiquity. It seemed to Christiane as if she had just been intruding into the grotto of a fairy.

Paul Brétigny said nothing. Gontran exclaimed:

"Oh! how pretty it would be if a woman, fair and rosy, were bathing in that stream!"

Then they turned back. The two first descents were easy, but the third frightened Christiane, it was so high and steep, with no places to step on.

Brétigny let himself slide down this rock, then stretching his arms towards her, said:

"Jump!"

She did not dare. Not that she was afraid of falling, but she was afraid of him, afraid above all of his eyes.

He gazed at her with the hungry look of a starved animal, with passion that had grown fierce, and his hands stretched towards her, drew her so imperiously that she was suddenly filled with terror and seized with a mad desire to scream, to flee away, to rush up the perpendicular walls of the mountain, so as to escape this irresistible appeal.

Her brother, standing behind her, cried: "Now! jump!" and pushed her. Feeling herself going, she closed her eyes, and as she was caught in a strong yet gentle clasp, she felt, without seeing, the strong body of the young man whose warm, panting breath passed over her face.

Then she found herself again on her feet, smiling, and for the time her fear was over while she watched Gontran slide down in his turn.

As this experience made her prudent, she was careful for several days never to be left alone with Brétigny, who seemed to prowl around her as the wolf in the fables circles round the lamb.

But then a long excursion was planned. They were to take provisions in the six-seated landau and go with the Oriol sisters to take dinner on the shore of a little lake. It was at Tazenat, and was called by the peasants the "Gour" of Tazenat. The plan was to return by moonlight.

So they started off on the afternoon of a very hot day, in the scorching sun that heated the granite walls of the mountain as hot as the stones of an oven.

The carriage slowly crawled up the hill, drawn by three panting horses, covered with foam. The driver drowsed on his seat, with his head nodding. Scores of green lizards ran over the rocks on the roadside. The scorching air seemed full of invisible and oppressive fiery dust. At times this seemed stationary, resistant, dense, then again it stirred a little and passed across their faces as fiery breaths of flame in which there floated an aroma of warm rosin from the far-reaching pine woods.

No one spoke in the carriage. The

three women in the back closed their dazzled eyes under the shade of their pink parasols. The marquis and Gontran slept with handkerchiefs over their faces. Paul gazed at Christiane, who also glanced at him from under her drooping lids.

And the landau, raising a column of white dust, always kept creeping up the interminable ascent.

When at last they reached the plateau, the driver sat up straight, the horses broke into a trot. They passed through a fine, rolling country, well-wooded and cultivated, with villages and isolated houses. To the left, in the distance, they saw the great truncated summits of the volcanoes. Their destination, Tazenat Lake, lay in the bottom of the most distant crater in the mountain chain of Auvergne.

After they had been driving three hours along the road, Paul said suddenly:

"Look at the lava!"

Brown, strangely twisted rocks with deep cracks lay along the way. On the right, they saw a squat mountain whose summit looked flat and hollow. They took a path that seemed to lead directly to this, through a triangular defile, and Christiane, who was standing up, suddenly caught a glimpse of a wide, deep crater enclosing a lovely lake as round and sparkling as a silver coin. The steep slopes of the mountain, wooded to the right, and bare to the left, dipped down into the water which they surrounded with a very high and regular inclosure. And the still water, as smooth and shining as metal, reflected the foliage of one slope and the bare rocks of the other so perfectly that one could not discern the margins of the lake. In the great funnel one could see only the center, where the blue sky was mirrored, as a clear, bottomless hole which seemed to pass through the earth, pierced from side to side, right through to the opposite sky.

And now the carriage could advance no further. So they all left it, and took a path on the wooded slope that, passing under the trees, circled around the lake half-way up the slope. This woodland path was used only by lumbermen, and was as green as a meadow. As they walked along it, they could see through the branches the opposite slope and the water gleaming at the bottom of this basin in the mountain.

Then through a clearing, they reached the shore of the lake, and sat down to rest on a grassy slope shaded by oak trees. And they all stretched themselves out on the grass with a delicious feeling of pleasure.

The men rolled in it and plunged their hands in it, and the women gently lay on it, resting their cheeks against the soft grass as if seeking there a cool caress.

After the heat of the roadside it was one of those delightful sensations, so deep and satisfying that they are almost worthy of being called happiness.

Then the marquis fell asleep again, and Gontran did the same. Paul talked with Christiane and the young girls. About what? Of nothing in particular. From time to time, one of them said a few words, another answered after a moment's silence, and their lingering words were as drowsy as their thoughts.

But when the driver brought up the basket of provisions, the Oriol girls, accustomed to keeping house at home and with the active habits of household

work, began at once to unpack the dinner and to spread the table a little further off on the grass.

Paul remained stretched on the grass beside Christiane, who was in a day-dream. Then he murmured, so low that she could hardly hear, so softly that the words touched her ear as lightly as the faint, mingled sounds borne by the wind: "These are the best moments of my life."

Why was it that these words of vague meaning stirred her to the depths of her heart? Why did she suddenly feel touched as she never had before?

She was looking through the trees at a small hut a little way off—a hunter's or fisherman's lodge, so small that it could not contain more than one room.

Paul followed her eyes, and he said:

"Have you ever thought, madame, what days passed together in a cabin like this might be to two beings that loved one another madly? They would be alone in the world, quite alone, face to face! And if such joy as that were possible, should one not leave everything and realize it? Happiness is so rare, so elusive and short-lived. Does one really live in every-day life? What is more dreary than to rise with no hope glowing in your heart, to mechanically do the same wearisome tasks, to eat and drink with moderation, and then to sleep tranquilly like an animal?"

She continued to gaze at the little cabin, and her heart swelled as if she must weep, for in a flash she guessed at intoxicating joys of which she had never before dreamed.

She thought, indeed, it would be sweet, to live together in this little home, hidden beneath the trees, looking down on this toy of a lake, this jewel of a lake, true mirror of love! How happy one would be thus, with no one near, without a neighbor, far from the noise of any creature, far from the sound of life, alone with a lover who would pass his hours kneeling at the feet of his adored, and gazing at her while she gazed at the blue wave, and he, kissing her finger-tips, whispered tender words of love.

They would live there in the silence under the trees, at the bottom of this crater which would circle their love, as it did the clear depths of the water within its strong and perfect inclosure. There they would live with no horizon for their eyes to rest on other than the rounded hill-slopes, with no horizon for their thoughts other than the joy of loving, with no horizon for their longings other than long and endless kisses.

Were there then people in the world who passed such days? Yes, without doubt! And why not? Why was it that she had not perceived ere this that such joys exist?

The girls came to say that dinner was ready. It was already six o'clock. They woke up the marquis and Gontran, and all went a little further on to where dinner was spread, and sat Turkish fashion beside their plates that slipped about on the grass. The men lazily let the two sisters continue to wait on the party. They ate slowly, throwing the scraps and the chicken bones into the water. Someone had put in some champagne, and the sudden popping of the first cork was a surprise to everyone, for it seemed so unexpected in this sylvan spot.

The day was drawing to a close, the air was cool and a strange, weird sadness fell with evening on the waters

sleeping in the heart of the crater.

When the sun was just sinking, the sky burst into flame, and the lake all at once appeared as a basin of fire. After sunset, when the horizon grew crimson as a brazier before its fire is extinguished, the lake looked as if it were a basin of blood. Suddenly the nearly full moon appeared over the crest of the hill, pale in the still flaming sky. Then, by degrees as the shadows spread over the earth, she rose round and shining, above the crater which was as round as the moon herself. It seemed as if she would fall in. Then, when the moon was high in the heavens, the lake looked like a basin of silver. And over its surface, that had been motionless all day, one could see tremblings pass, sometimes slow and sometimes fast. It was as if spirits were fluttering over the still water and trailing in it their invisible veils.

It was the large fish that live in the bottom, the century-old carp and the voracious pike, that had come up to the surface to sport in the moonlight.

The Oriol girls had put away all the dishes and bottles in the basket that the driver came to carry. Then the party started back home.

As she was passing through the woodland path beneath the trees where rays of light fell through the leaves like a shower on the grass, Christiane, who was coming next to the last, heard a voice that whispered close to her ear: "I love you! I love you! I love you!"

Her heart began to beat so wildly that she almost fell, and thought she could not take another step. Still she walked on like one bereft of reason, on the verge of turning back, her arms outstretched, and her lips tightly strained. He had now caught the edge of the little shawl over her shoulders, and he was kissing it madly. Half-fainting, she kept on walking, and could no longer feel the ground beneath her feet.

Suddenly she passed out from under the sheltering canopy of trees, and finding herself in the full moonlight, she mastered her agitation. But before entering the landau and losing sight of the lake, she half-turned back, and with both hands threw a long kiss to the water, that the man who was following her well understood.

All the way home she felt numb in body and soul, stunned, unnerved, as after a fall. The moment she reached the hotel, she rushed upstairs to shut herself up in her own room. When she had bolted the door, she even turned the key as well, so strong was her feeling that she was pursued. Then she stood trembling in the middle of the room that was almost dark and nearly empty. The lighted candles that stood on the table threw trembling shadows on the walls of the furnishings and the curtains. Christiane sank into an arm-chair. All her thoughts were rushing and leaping through her mind and fled before she could grasp them, hold them, and link them into a chain. She felt now on the verge of tears, not knowing why, heart-broken, wretched, desolate in this bare room, adrift from her way in life as if lost in a forest.

Where was she drifting, what was she doing?

Scarcely able to breathe, she rose, opened the window and the shutter, and rested her elbows on the window-sill. The air was cool. In the depths of the vast, empty heavens, the distant moon,

alone and mournful, rose through the bluish heights of night and shed a cold, hard glitter on the trees and the mountain. The whole village was sleeping. The light strain of Saint-Landri's violin, for he practiced later and later every evening, floated by and at moments sobbed in the deep silence of the valley. Christiane hardly heard it. The shrill and plaintive cry of the sinewy strings ceased and then began once more.

And the moon wandering in the lonely heavens, and this faint sound lost in the silent night, filled her heart with such desolation that she burst into sobs. She trembled and shivered to the marrow of her bones, shaken by the agony and shudderings of one stricken with a mortal illness. For suddenly she perceived that she, herself, was also alone in life.

She had never been conscious of this until this night. Now she realized it with such keen distress of mind that she thought she would go mad.

She had a father! a brother! a husband! And she still loved them and they loved her! Now all at once she was remote from them, she had become a stranger to them as if she hardly knew them. The placid affection of her father, the friendly comradeship of her brother, the cold tenderness of her husband, seemed to her as nothing any more, nothing any more! Her husband! So that was her husband, that rosy-cheeked chatterbox, who said to her carelessly: "Are you well this morning, dear?" She belonged to him —to this man—body and soul, by virtue of a contract. Was it possible? Oh! How desolate and lost she felt. She had closed her eyes to look within, to the depths of her thoughts.

And as she called them one after another before her mind, she saw the faces of those who lived close to her. There was her father, untroubled and calm, contented if only no one disturbed his repose; her brother, mocking and skeptical; her husband, running about, his head full of figures, and who would say to her: "I have made a good deal, just now," when he should have said: "I love you."

Another had whispered these words, which still were trembling in her ears and in her heart. She could see him, too, this other man, fascinating her with his fixed gaze, and, if he had been near her at this moment, she would have thrown herself into his arms!

CHAPTER VII

MAGIC EFFECT OF SPRING

Christiane, who had not lain down till very late, woke as soon as the sun threw a flood of rosy light through her wide open window.

She looked at the time—five o'clock —and lay back luxuriously in the warm bed. She felt so full of life and so joyous that it seemed to her as if a

joy, a great joy, a wonderful joy, had come to her during the night. What joy? She wondered, and tried to think what happy news had so filled her with delight. All her sadness had vanished, melted away as she slept.

So Paul Brétigny loved her! How different he seemed to her from the first day they met! In spite of all her efforts to remember, she could not picture him as he had first appeared to her, nor remember her impressions of him. She could not even recall at all the man that her brother had introduced. The man she knew to-day had retained nothing of the other—neither the face nor manners—nothing. For the first impression he had made had gradually faded, day by day, undergoing all the slight changes that take place in the mind, when a person one has seen becomes an acquaintance, then a familiar friend, and at last a lover. One gains possession of him hour by hour, without being conscious of it. He enters in one's eyes and heart through his voice, his gestures, all that he says, all that he thinks. One absorbs him, one understands him; one anticipates the meaning of all his words and smiles. At last, it seems as if he belonged to one wholly, so deeply does one unconsciously love all that he is and does.

Then it is impossible to recall how he appeared before one's indifferent eyes when first one saw him.

So Paul Brétigny loved her! Christiane felt at that thought neither fear nor anguish, but a profound tenderness, a great joy, a new and exquisite joy of being loved and knowing that she was loved.

She was a little uneasy, however, as to the mutual attitude they ought to assume. But as it was a delicate matter even to think of, she dismissed it from her mind, and trusted to her shrewdness and skill to control future events. She went downstairs at the usual time, and found Paul smoking a cigarette in front of the hotel. He greeted her respectfully.

"Good-morning, madame. Do you feel well this morning?"

She answered, smilingly:

"Very well, monsieur; I slept splendidly."

And she gave him her hand, although she feared he would hold it too long. But he scarcely even pressed it, and they began to chat calmly as if they had both forgotten.

And the whole day passed without his doing anything to bring to mind his ardent avowal of the evening before. The following days he continued equally reserved and calm, and she regained confidence in him. He had realized, she thought, that he would offend her if he grew bolder. She hoped, she firmly believed, that they had stopped at that charming stage of tenderness when one can love, looking into the depths of one another's eyes, without remorse, being pure.

She was careful, however, not to wander off alone with him.

But one evening, the Saturday of the week that they had been to the lake of Tazenat, as they were going upstairs in the hotel, at about ten o'clock, the marquis, Christiane, and Paul—for they had left Gontran playing écarté with MM. Aubry-Pasteur, Riquier, and Dr. Honorat in the large hall of the casino—Brétigny exclaimed, as he saw the moon gleaming through the branches:

"How lovely it would be to go and

see the ruins of Tournoël on such a night as this!"

At the mere thought, Christiane was affected, for the moon and ruins had on her the same influence that they have on the minds of nearly all women.

She caught the marquis' hand and cried:

"Oh! dear father, wouldn't you like to go?"

He hesitated, for he wanted to go to sleep.

She kept urging him:

"Only think, it is so beautiful by day at Tournoël! You said yourself that you had never seen such a picturesque ruin, with the great tower above the château. What must it be at night!"

So at last he consented.

"Well, let us go; but we will only look at it for five minutes and then return at once. For my part, I want to be in bed by eleven."

"Yes, we will come home at once. It only takes twenty minutes to go there."

They started off, all three, Christiane leaning on her father's arm and Paul walking beside her.

He talked of his travels, in Switzerland, Italy, and Sicily. He described his impressions of things he had seen. He told of his enthusiasm on the summit of Monte Rosa when the sun, rising to the level of these icy peaks of the frost world of eternal snow, threw on each of these mighty heights a white and dazzling radiance and illumined them like the pale beacons that lighten the kingdoms of the dead. Then he described his emotion as he stood on the rim of the gigantic crater of Mount Etna, when he felt like an imperceptible atom, at a height of three thousand meters up in the clouds, with no longer anything but the sea and sky around him—the blue sea below, the blue sky above—while he stood over the frightful mouth of the volcano whose exhalations stifled him.

He exaggerated these scenes so as to stir the young woman's enthusiasm, and she listened with beating heart, seeing with the eye of fancy all these wonderful things that he had seen.

All at once at a turn in the road they saw Tournoël. The ancient castle stood on a mountain summit, and was crowned by its tall, slender tower that was pierced so that shafts of moonlight streamed through its walls. The castle, despoiled by time and wars of ancient days, traced on a sky of phantoms its great shadow of a fantastic mansion.

All three paused, filled with surprise. At length the marquis said:

"Indeed, it is very lovely. One would think it was the realization of one of Gustave Doré's dreams. Let us sit down here for five minutes."

And he seated himself on the grassy roadside.

But Christiane, wild with enthusiasm, cried:

"Oh! father, let us go further. It's so beautiful! so very beautiful! Let us walk to the foot, I beg you."

The marquis refused this time.

"No, my darling, I've walked enough. I really cannot go any further. If you wish to see it closer go there with M. Brétigny. I will wait for you here."

Paul asked:

"Will you come, madame?"

She hesitated between two fears—that of being alone with him, and that of wounding the feelings of a good man by seeming to doubt him.

The marquis repeated:

"Go on, go on! I will wait for you."

Then she remembered that her father would be within sound of their voices, and she said firmly:

"Let us go, monsieur."

And they started off, walking side by side.

But she had not walked more than a few moments when she felt overcome by a keen emotion, by a vague and mysterious fear, fear of the ruin, fear of the night, fear of this man. All at once her limbs grew weak, as that evening at the lake at Tazenat, and refused to carry her further. They bent beneath her weight and felt as if they sank into the ground, in which her feet were held when she tried to raise them.

A great chestnut tree growing along the roadside, sheltered the edge of a meadow. Christiane, as breathless as though she had been running, sank down against the trunk, and stammered:

"I will stop here. We can see quite well."

Paul sat beside her. She heard the throbbing of his heart. He said after a short silence:

"Do you believe that we have lived in the world before, in a former existence?"

She murmured, without having well understood his question, so great was her agitation:

"I don't know. I have never thought about it."

He resumed:

"For my part, I believe it in moments—or rather I feel it. As a person is composed of mind and body, apparently distinct, but doubtless parts of the same substance, he should reappear when the elements of which he was formed combine a second time. To be sure, it is not the same individual; but it is the same personality that returns when a body similar to one preceding is occupied by a soul resembling that which animated it formerly. Well, this evening, madame, I am sure that once I lived in this château, that I owned it, that I built it for myself, and that I defended it against enemies. I recognize it; it was mine, I am certain! And I am certain of this, too, that there I loved a woman who looked like you —who was called, like you, Christiane! I am so sure of this that I seem to see you still, calling to me from the heights of the tower. Try to remember! There is a wood at the back which slopes down to a ravine. We often walked there. You wore light garments those summer evenings and I carried a heavy sword which clanked in the leafy stillness.

"Don't you remember? Oh! try, Christiane! and your name is as familiar to me as those one hears from childhood! If we should look carefully at the stones of that fortress, we would find it carved by my own hand in the olden days! I assure you that I recognize my home, my native place, as I recognized you, you yourself, the very first time I saw you!"

He spoke with an exalted tone of conviction, intoxicated with poetry, by the presence of this woman, and by the night, the moon, and the ruin.

Suddenly he sank on his knees before Christiane, and in trembling tones murmured:

"Let me adore you still, now that I have found you once more! Think how long I have been seeking for you!"

She wished to rise, to leave, to rejoin her father; but she had not the strength,

she had not the courage, for she was held back by the burning wish to hear more, to listen on to these enchanting words that went to her heart. She felt borne away in a dream—in a dream that she had always longed for, so sweet, so poetic, full of the rays of moonlight and love ballads.

He had caught her hands and kissed the ends of her fingers, stammering:

"Christiane! Christiane! Take me! Kill me! I love you! Christiane!"

She felt him trembling, quivering at her feet. She feared he might go mad and rose to escape. But he had risen more quickly, and seizing her in his arms, pressed his lips against hers.

Then without a cry, as if his caress had crushed her will and robbed her of all powers of resistance, she sank into his arms.

But as he loosened his clasp she rushed away distractedly, suddenly chilled and shivering like a person who has just fallen into the water. He strode after her and caught her by the arm, whispering: "Christiane, Christiane! Be careful before your father!"

She walked on, not replying or looking back, but going straight on to her father.

Paul followed her without daring to speak to her.

As soon as the marquis saw them he rose.

"Come along quickly," he said, "I was beginning to get cold. These scenes are very beautiful, but bad for one who is taking the treatment."

As soon as she was back again in her room, she undressed in a few seconds and got into bed, hiding her head under the covers, then she wept. She wept with her face hidden in the pillow for a long, long time, feeling benumbed and prostrated. She did not think, she did not suffer, she did not regret. She wept without thought, without reflection, without knowing why. She wept instinctively, as one sings when one is glad. Then, when her tears were exhausted, overcome and worn out with sobbing she fell asleep.

She was awakened by light taps at the door of her room, which opened into the sitting-room. It was bright day, and just nine o'clock. She cried: "Come in!" And her husband entered, happy, bright, wearing a travelling cap, and carrying by his side a little money bag that he always kept with him in travelling.

He exclaimed:

"What, you were still asleep, my dear! And I woke you. Here I am! I came without sending any message. I hope you are feeling well. The weather is superb in Paris."

And he took off his cap and went to kiss her.

But she moved away towards the wall, seized with a foolish fear, a nervous dread of this little man, so rosy and contented, who offered to kiss her lips.

Then suddenly, closing her eyes, she offered him her forehead. He calmly placed a kiss upon it and asked:

"May I wash a little in your dressing-room? As they did not expect me to-day, my room was not prepared for me."

She stammered:

"Why, certainly."

And he vanished through a door at the foot of the bed.

She heard him moving about, splashing the water, puffing and blowing, then

he called out:

"What's the news here? For my part, I have splendid news. The analysis of the water has given even better results than we hoped for. We can cure at least three diseases more than they can at Royat. It's splendid!"

She was sitting up in bed, choking, her mind all bewildered by this unexpected return, which struck her as a sudden pang and pressed on her heart like remorse. He had come back, contented, diffusing around him a strong fragrance of verbena. Then he sat familiarly on the foot of the bed, and asked:

"And the paralytic! How is he getting on? Has he begun to walk again, yet? It isn't possible that he won't be cured with what we have found in the water!"

She had forgotten about him for several days, and she stammered:

"Why—I—I think he is beginning to improve—really, I haven't seen him this week. I—I am not very well."

He looked at her carefully and then replied:

"It's true, you are a little pale. But it is quite becoming to you. You are charming thus—altogether charming."

He drew closer to her, and leaning towards her, tried to put his arm around her waist.

But she shrank back with such terror that he was dazed and remained motionless, with his arms outstretched and his lips raised to hers. Then he asked:

"What's the matter with you? Can't anyone touch you any more? I assure you that I do not want to hurt you!"

Then he drew nearer with affection.

But she stammered:

"No—leave me—leave me. It is—it is—I think——"

Then she whispered. And his face broke into smiles.

She had said this in an agony of mind, without a moment's thought, to avoid him.

He grew pale in his turn, touched with a deep joy, and he whispered only: "So soon!" He wished to caress her gently, tenderly. Then with a sudden doubt he said:

"Can it be true? You think it possible?"

She answered:

"Yes, it is possible!"

Then he jumped up and down the room for joy, and clapping his hands, cried:

"Christi, Christi, what a happy day!"

Once again there was a knock at the door. Andermatt opened it, and the chambermaid said to him:

"Dr. Latonne would like to speak at once to monsieur."

"Very well. Show him into our sitting-room and I will see him there."

He went into the next room, and the doctor came in at the same moment. His expression was very solemn, and his manner was cold and formal. He bowed, touched the hand that the banker in some surprise held out to him, sat down and explained the purpose of his visit in the serious tones of a second in a duelling affair.

"My dear sir, a very disagreeable circumstance has come up which I must tell you in order to explain my conduct. When you did me the honor of consulting me in regard to your wife, I hastened to her at the very hour you named; but it seems that several minutes before my arrival my confrère, the medical inspector, in whom no doubt

Madame Andermatt feels more confidence, had been called by the Marquis of Ravenel. As a result, since I was the second to come, I seem to have taken by ruse from Dr. Bonnefille a patient who was already under his care. Thus I seem to have acted in a way that was discourteous, unbecoming, and unjustifiable between brother physicians. And in the practice of our art we must, monsieur, take all precautions and use great tact to avoid all affronts that may lead to serious consequences. Dr. Bonnefille was informed of my visit here, and as he thought me capable of such an act of discourtesy—appearances, indeed, being against me—has spoken of it in such terms, that if it were not for his age, I should have felt compelled to demand satisfaction from him. There is but one course for me to pursue to clear myself in his eyes and in the eyes of all the medical corps of the country, and that is to cease, to my regret, from caring for your wife, and to tell you all the facts of the case, begging you at the same time to accept my apologies."

Andermatt replied with embarrassment:

"I understand perfectly, doctor, the awkward position in which you are placed. The fault, however, is not mine nor my wife's, but my father-in-law's, who called M. Bonnefille without letting me know beforehand. Could I not find your colleague and tell him?"

Dr. Latonne interrupted him:

"It's useless, my dear sir, for a question of professional etiquette and honor is involved which I must respect before everything, and in spite of my sincere regrets——"

Andermatt in his turn interrupted him. The rich man—the man who could pay, the man who could buy a prescription of five, ten, twenty, or forty francs as if it were a three-cent box of matches, who thought that everything should belong to him because of the power of his money, who rated people and things only by a money standard, by a rapid and direct ratio made between the coined metals and everything else in the world—grew angry at the presumption of this dealer of remedies written on paper. He said stiffly:

"Very well, doctor, let the matter rest there. I only hope that this measure may not have an unfortunate influence on your career. We shall see in the future which of us will suffer most from your resolve."

The doctor, offended, rose, and bowing with formal politeness, said:

"I do not doubt, monsieur, that I shall be the one. What I have done today is very painful to me on all accounts. But I never hesitate between my interests and my conscience."

Then he left the room. As he passed through the door he ran against the marquis, who was coming in with a letter in his hand. And M. Ravenel exclaimed, the moment he was alone with his son-in-law:

"Look, my dear fellow, here is a great annoyance that has come to me through your fault. Dr. Bonnefille, offended because you consulted his colleague in regard to Christiane, has sent me this very sharp note to the effect that I can no longer count on his professional experience."

Then Andermatt was furious. He walked up and down, growing more and more excited as he talked, and he

gesticulated wildly, full of a harmless, superficial anger, one of those rages that no one takes seriously. He shouted out his arguments. Whose fault was it, after all? The marquis alone was to blame for having called in that ass laden with a pack, Bonnefille, without even having told Andermatt, who had been informed, thanks to his Paris physician, as to the relative worth of the three quacks at Enval!

And then what right had the marquis to have a consultation made behind the husband's back—the husband, who should be the sole judge, and alone responsible for his wife's health? Finally, it was the same way, every day, in everything! Those around him were all the time doing silly things, nothing but silly things! He was always saying this, but he was crying in a desert, for no one understood, no one believed in his experience until it was too late.

And he said "my doctor," "my experience" with the authority of a man who has in reserve unique powers. The possessive pronouns rang in his mouth with the sonorous sound of metal. And when he said, "my wife," one felt it was very clear that the marquis no longer had any right over his daughter since Andermatt had married her, marrying and buying having the same meaning in his mind.

Gontran came in during the hottest part of the discussion, and he sat down in an armchair with a smile of amusement on his lips. He said nothing; he listened, greatly entertained.

When the banker stopped for lack of breath, his brother-in-law raised his hand, crying:

"I ask for the floor. Here you both are without doctors, aren't you? Well, I propose the name of my candidate, Dr. Honorat, the only one who has a true knowledge of the waters of Enval. He makes other people drink them, but he would not drink them himself for anything in the world. Would you like me to go and look for him? I will arrange the whole matter."

It was the only course to pursue, and they asked Gontran to bring him at once. The marquis, filled with uneasiness at the thought of a change of diet and nursing, wished to know immediately the opinion of this new doctor. And Andermatt was equally anxious to consult him in regard to Christiane.

She heard through the door the sound of their voices, without listening and without understanding what they were talking about. The moment her husband had left her she rose and dressed hurriedly, without the help of a maid, her mind agitated by all these events.

The world about her seemed to have changed, life itself was different from what it had been yesterday; even the people seemed altogether different.

Andermatt's voice rose again:

"Well, my dear Brétigny, how are you?"

He no longer said monsieur.

Another voice answered:

"Why, very well, indeed, my dear Andermatt. So you just came this morning?"

Christiane, who was just putting up her hair, paused, choking, and stood with her arms still raised. Through the wall she fancied that she could see them, shaking hands. She sank into a chair, unable to stand longer, and her hair, uncoiling, fell back over her shoulders.

It was Paul who was now speaking, and she quivered from head to foot at every word that fell from his lips. Each word, although she could not grasp its meaning fell on her heart and rang there like a hammer striking a bell.

All at once she said almost aloud: "Why, I love him. I love him!" as if she were stating a new and surprising fact that saved her, that consoled her, that vindicated her innocence before her conscience. She sat upright with sudden energy, and in a second her course was chosen. She began again to arrange her hair, whispering: "I love him, that is all."

And behind the wall that separated them she threw him kisses. It was done. She gave herself to him wholly, as one might offer oneself to a god. The child, already a coquette and artful, but still timid and trembling, had suddenly died within her, and the woman was born ready for passion, a woman resolute, determined, the only indication of this hitherto being in the energy hidden in her blue eye, which gave a look of courage, almost of boldness, to the tiny, blonde face.

She heard the door open and, without turning, divined that it was her husband, as if a new sense, almost an instinct, had also developed in her.

He asked:

"Will you soon be ready? We are going at once to watch the paralytic, to see if he is really better."

She answered calmly:

"Yes, Will dear, in five minutes."

But Gontran, who had returned to the sitting-room, called Andermatt.

"Just imagine," said he, "I met that imbecile Honorat in the park and he refuses also to take care of you, through fear of the others. He speaks of precedents, respect, customs. One would think—he looked as if—briefly, he is a fool like his two colleagues. Really, I would have thought him less of an ape."

The marquis' hopes were dashed to the ground. The thought of taking mineral waters without a physician, the possibility of bathing five minutes too long, or of drinking a glassful too little, tortured him with anxiety. He conceived of all the doses, the hours, and the phases of treatment as being ruled directly by a law of Nature, who had invalids in mind when she made the waters flow, and thought the doctors knew all her mysterious secrets like wise and inspired priests.

He cried:

"So we are to perish here! One could die like a dog without any of these gentlemen troubling themselves!"

And he was filled with rage—the selfish, furious rage of a man whose health is threatened.

"Have they the right to do this, just because they pay for a license like grocers, these scoundrels? They should be compelled to take care of people, as trains are obliged to carry all passengers. I am going to write to the newspapers to call attention to this."

He walked to and fro agitatedly, then he resumed, turning towards his son:

"Listen, we must call one in from Royat or Clermont. We cannot go on like this!"

Gontran answered, laughing:

"But the doctors of Clermont and Royat do not know all the properties of the Enval water, which has not precisely the same effect as theirs on the digestive tube and the circulatory sys-

tem. And then you may be sure that they would avoid appearing to take the ground from under the feet of their colleagues."

The marquis, quite frightened, faltered:

"Then what will become of us?"

Andermatt caught up his hat.

"Let me manage it, and I promise you that we shall have all three—do you realize it?—all three at our feet by this evening. Come, let us go now and see the paralytic."

He called:

"Are you ready, Christiane?"

She appeared on the threshold, very pale but determined. When she had kissed her father and her brother, she turned to Paul and held out her hand to him. He took it with downcast eyes, trembling with emotion. As the marquis, Andermatt, and Gontran had gone on ahead, chatting together without noticing them, she said in a firm voice, while she looked steadily at the young man:

"Mon cher ami."

Then she went out without letting him reply.

As they neared the Oriols' spring they saw the hat of Père Clovis, like an enormous mushroom. He was sleeping in the sunshine in the warm water in the bottom of his hole. He now spent his entire mornings there, accustomed to the scorching bath that made him feel, he said, "merrier than a bridegroom."

Andermatt woke him.

"Well, my good fellow, are you getting better?"

As soon as he recognized his patron the old rascal gave a grin of satisfaction.

"Yes, yes, I am getting on, getting on as well as you please."

"Are you beginning to walk?"

"Like a hare, sir, like a hare. I will dance a bourrée with my sweetheart the first Sunday of the month."

Andermatt's heart beat fast with joy. He asked:

"Really, can you walk?"

Père Clovis stopped joking.

"Oh, not much, not much. No matter, I am getting on."

Then the banker wanted to see at once how the vagabond walked. He went to and fro around the hole, in a state of excitement, issuing orders as if he were getting a ship afloat again after it had sunk.

"Here, Gontran, take his right arm; you, Brétigny, his left. I will support his back. Come, all together—one, two, three. My dear father-in-law, pull his leg towards you—no, the other, the one that is still in the water. Hurry, I beg you, I can't hold out much longer! Now we're ready—one, two, three—ouf!"

They seated the old fellow on the ground. He let them do as they wished with a bantering look, and did not assist them at all in their efforts.

Then they raised him again and set him on his feet, giving him his crutches, which he used as canes. He began to walk, bent double, dragging his feet, whining and panting. He crept along like a snail and left behind him a long trail of water on the white dust of the road.

Andermatt, wild with enthusiasm, clapped his hands, and shouted as one does at the theater to applaud the actors: "Bravo, bravo, splendid, bravo!!!" Then as the old rascal seemed weak, he rushed up to support

him, and caught him in his arms although his clothes were streaming, and he said:

"That's enough. Don't fatigue yourself. We will put you back again in the bath."

And Père Clovis was plunged again into his hole by the four men who had grasped his four limbs and carried him with care, like a fragile and valuable object.

Then the paralytic declared in a tone of conviction:

"It's good water all the same, good water that has no equal. That is worth a treasure, water like that!"

Andermatt turned suddenly to his father-in-law.

"Don't wait for me at lunch. I am going over to the Oriols' and I don't know when I shall be at leisure. It's not well to let these matters drag."

And he left hastily, almost on a run, twirling his stick like a man who is perfectly delighted.

The others sat down under the willows on the roadside, facing Père Clovis' hole.

Christiane, sitting by Paul, gazed before her at the high knoll where she had seen the great rock blown up. She had been up there that day, hardly a month ago. She sat on that russet grass. One month! Not more than a month! She recalled the slightest details, the tricolor parasols, the scullions, the lightest words of any of them! And the dog, the poor dog that was blown to pieces by the explosion! And this tall stranger who had rushed at a word of hers to save the creature! To-day he was her lover, her lover! So she had a lover. She was his—she was his! She repeated this in the depths of her consciousness. How strange! This man sitting beside her, whose hand she saw plucking one by one the blades of grass near her dress that he sought to touch, this man was now linked to her life by that mysterious link that nature has stretched between woman and man.

They came nearer and nearer, and their little fingers touched. They barely touched, so softly did they meet, lost and found one another again, like lips that caress. But this imperceptible caress, this light touch, affected her so strongly that she felt herself on the point of fainting.

And she realized suddenly how one may belong to another. How one's personality may be lost in the love that takes possession of one.

The marquis and Gontran talked about the future watering resort, for they were themselves won over by Will's enthusiasm. And they talked of the banker's merits, the clearness of his mind, the certainty of his speculative methods, the boldness of his actions, and the stability of his character. Father-in-law and brother-in-law both, in view of the probable success, that they felt was certain, agreed in congratulating themselves on this alliance.

Christiane and Paul did not seem to hear, they were thinking so much of each other.

The marquis said to his daughter: "Ah, darling, you may easily be one day one of the richest women of France, and people will speak of you as they do of the Rothschilds. Will is really a remarkable man, very remarkable—a wonderful mind."

But a sudden strange jealousy entered Paul's heart.

"Oh, don't speak of it! I know it, the intelligence of all those business-brewers. They have but one thing in their heads—money! All the thought that we give to beautiful things, all the time for actions that we lose in dreaming, all the hours that we throw away on amusements, all the energy that we squander on our pleasures, all the ardor and power that love takes from us, divine love, they devote to seeking gold, thinking of gold, piling up gold! These superficial men bear the same relation to men of true worth that the picture dealer does to the artist, the editor to the author, and the theater manager to the dramatic poet."

He stopped suddenly, realizing that he had allowed himself to be carried away, and he continued more calmly:

"I don't mean that at all in regard to Andermatt, who I think is a charming man. I like him very much, because he is a hundred times better than all the others."

Christiane had drawn away her hand. Paul again stopped talking. Gontran began to laugh, and in his mischievous voice, in which he ventured to say anything when he was in a teasing mood, said:

"In my case, my dear fellow, that kind of men have one merit, and that is to marry our sisters and to have rich daughters who become our wives."

The marquis, offended, rose to his feet.

"Oh, Gontran!" he cried, "sometimes you are really revolting."

Paul then turned to Christiane and whispered:

"Would they know how to die for a woman, or even to give her all their fortune—all—without keeping anything?"

That said so clearly: "Everything I have is yours, even to my life," that she was touched, and she devised this trick to take his hands.

"Please rise and help me up. I am so numb I cannot move."

He rose, caught her by the wrists and raised her to her feet on the edge of the road close beside him. She saw his lips falter: "I love you!" and she turned quickly so as not to answer him in these three words that flashed to her lips despite her.

They returned to the hotel.

As the bathing hour had passed, they waited for lunch time. When it was announced there was no sign of Andermatt; after another walk around the park they decided to sit down at table. The meal, although long, was ended without the banker's appearing. So they went down again to sit under the trees. And the hours, one after another passed. The sunlight crept from the trees towards the mountains. The day ebbed away, but still Will did not appear.

Suddenly they caught sight of him. He was walking fast, holding his hat in his hand, wiping his forehead, his cravat was on one side, his vest half-open, and he looked as one does after a voyage, after a struggle, after a terrible and prolonged strife.

The moment he saw his father-in-law, he shouted:

"Victory! It's done! but what a day, my friends! Ah, the old fox, he gave me a hard time of it!"

And he told at once of the steps he had taken, and his difficulties.

Père Oriol had at first shown himself so unreasonable that Andermatt had broken up the negotiations and left.

Then they had called him back. The peasant maintained that he would not sell his lands, but he would assign them to the company with the right to recover them in case of failure. He demanded half the proceeds in case of success.

The banker had had to prove to him with figures on paper and diagrams to represent the pieces of property, that the fields in all were not worth more than forty thousand francs, market value, while the expenses of the company would rise at one stroke to a million.

But the peasant of Auvergne had answered that he expected to benefit by the enormous increase of value given to his property by the establishment and the hotels, and that he should draw interest on the basis of the increased value, and not the past value.

Andermatt then had to show him that the risks would be proportioned to the possible gains, and thus to terrify him with fears of loss.

Finally they had reached this conclusion: Père Oriol would assign to the company all the lands extending along the banks of the stream. That included all those where it seemed possible to find mineral water. Then in addition, the crest of the knoll for the erection of the casino and a hotel, and also some vineyards on the slope that were to be cut up into lots and offered to the leading physicians of Paris.

The peasant, in return for this assignment—which was valued at two hundred and fifty thousand francs, or about four times its actual value—would be entitled to one-fourth of the company's profits. As he still owned ten times more land than he assigned around the establishment, he was sure, in case of success, of making a fortune by the careful sale of these lands, which he said would be his daughters' dowries.

As soon as these conditions were agreed to, Will had had to drag the father and son to the notary's to have a promise of sale drawn up, under the condition that it would be annulled if the required amount of water was not found.

And the drawing up of these conditions, the discussion on each point, the endless repetitions of the same arguments, the everlasting recommencement of the same line of reasoning, had continued through the entire afternoon. At last it was done. The banker had his watering resort. But he said, torn by regrets:

"But I shall have to limit myself to the water rights, and not think about the property. He was sharp, the old ape!"

Then he added:

"Bah! I'll buy up the old company's property and that will give me a chance for speculation. Well, anyway, I must go back to Paris to-night."

The marquis, astonished, cried:

"What, to-night?"

"Yes, my dear father-in-law, to arrange a final contract while M. Aubry-Pasteur makes his borings. Then I must also make arrangements to have the work begin in fifteen days. I haven't an hour to lose. And apropos of all this, I must tell you that you are a member of my board of directors, in which I shall need a strong majority. I will make you a present of ten shares. And, Gontran, I will also give you ten shares."

Gontran laughed.

"Thank you very much, my dear fel-

low, I'll sell them back to you. That makes you in debt to me five thousand francs."

But Andermatt was not in a joking mood when such serious matters were under discussion. He answered dryly:

"If you are not in earnest, I will address myself to someone else."

Gontran stopped laughing.

"No, no, my good friend, you know that I am wholly devoted to your interests."

The banker turned to Paul.

"My dear sir, would you do me a friendly service? That is, to also accept ten shares and act as a director?"

Paul replied with a bow:

"Will you allow me to decline your kind offer, and to invest a hundred thousand francs in this enterprise which I think has a splendid future? It is I then who ask a favor of you."

William, delighted, grasped his hand, overcome by such a mark of confidence. Besides, he always felt an irresistible desire to embrace anyone who furnished him with money, for his enterprises.

But Christiane blushed to her temples. It seemed as if they had just bought and sold her. If he had not loved her, would Paul have offered these hundred thousand francs to her husband? Unquestionably, no! At least he should not have carried on this transaction before her.

The dinner-bell rang, and they returned to the hotel. The moment they had taken their places at table, Madame Paille, the mother, asked Andermatt:

"So you are going to found another establishment?"

The news had already spread throughout the whole place. Everybody knew about it and all the bathers were excited.

William replied:

"*Mon Dieu,* yes. The present one is too inadequate."

And turning to M. Aubry-Pasteur, he said:

"Will you pardon me, my dear sir, if I speak at table of a matter that I should rather have mentioned to you in private? But I leave again to-night for Paris, and time presses, terribly. Would you consent to superintend the work of excavating for a greater volume of water?"

The engineer, flattered, accepted and in the midst of a general pause in the conversation, they arranged all the essential points of the prospecting, which was to begin at once. Everything was discussed and decided upon in a few minutes with the clearness and precision that Andermatt always brought to bear in business. Then they spoke of the paralytic. He had been seen crossing the park in the afternoon, using only one cane, although that very morning he had leaned on two. The banker said: "It's a miracle, a real miracle. His cure is progressing with giant strides."

Paul, to humor the husband, said:

"It's Père Clovis, himself, who is walking with giant strides."

An approving laugh circled the table. All eyes were fixed on Will and all lips complimented him. The waiters of the restaurant had commenced to serve him first with a respectful deference that vanished from their faces and gestures the moment they passed a dish to any of his neighbors.

One of them brought him a card on a plate.

He took it and read aloud:

"Dr. Latonne of Paris would be happy if M. Andermatt could kindly grant him a few seconds for an interview before his departure."

"Tell him that I have not time, but that I will be back in eight or ten days."

At the same moment they brought a box of flowers to Christiane from Dr. Honorat.

Gontran laughed.

"Père Bonnefille is a poor third," he said.

Dinner was nearly finished. They brought word to Andermatt that his carriage was waiting. He went upstairs for his little bag, and when he came down to the door, he found half the village gathered there. Petrus Martel came forward to grasp his hand with the familiarity of a strolling actor, and whispered in his ear:

"I shall have a proposition to make to you, something fundamentally important for your undertaking."

Suddenly, Dr. Bonnefille appeared, hurrying as usual. He came close to Will, and bowing very low as he did before the marquis, he said:

"A pleasant journey, baron."

"He's won," Gontran whispered.

Andermatt triumphant, filled with joy and pride, shook hands with everybody, thanked them all and repeated over and over: *"Au revoir!"* But he almost forgot to kiss his wife, he was so taken up with other matters. This carelessness was a relief to her, and as she watched the landau disappearing in the distance, on the dusky road, drawn rapidly by two horses, it seemed to her as though she had nothing to fear from anyone for the rest of her life.

She passed the whole evening sitting in front of the hotel, between her father and Paul Brétigny. Gontran had gone to the casino, as he did every day.

She did not want to walk nor to talk, and sat motionless, her hands clasped on her lap, her eyes gazing into the darkness. She felt tired and languid, a little uneasy, yet happy, hardly thinking, not even dreaming, striving at moments against vague feelings of remorse which she quelled by repeating to herself always: "I love him, I love him, I love him!"

She went early to her room, to be alone and think. Sitting in the depths of an arm-chair and wrapped in a dressing gown that floated about her she looked at the stars through her open window. And in the frame of that window, she called up in fancy every instant, the image of the one who had won her heart. She saw him, kind, gentle and intense, so strong yet so yielding to her. The man had taken possession of her, she felt it, taken possession of her forever. She was no longer alone; they were two whose two hearts would form but a single heart, whose two souls would form but a single soul. Where he was she did not know, but she knew well that he was dreaming of her, as she was of him. At every heartbeat she fancied that she could hear another somewhere answering hers. She felt all around her a passion that soared over her like the wings of a bird in flight. She felt this longing streaming in through the open window, this ardent longing that came from him who was seeking her and entreating her in the silence of the night. How good it was, sweet and novel to be loved.

What joy to think of someone with tears gathering in one's eyes, to weep with tenderness, and with a longing to stretch one's arms towards him even without seeing him, to call him, to open wide one's arms towards one's vision of him, towards that kiss that he was endlessly throwing from far or near, in the fever of his waiting.

And she stretched out her two arms, so white from the hanging sleeves of her dressing gown, towards the stars. Suddenly she uttered a cry. A tall, dark shadow strode over her balcony and stood before her window.

She sprang up wildly! It was he! And without thinking that they might be seen, she held out her arms to him.

CHAPTER VIII

FRESH SCHEMES

ANDERMATT's absence was prolonged. M. Aubry-Pasteur meanwhile made the excavations. He discovered four new springs which would give twice as much water as would be required by the new company. The whole country round had gone crazy over the prospecting, the discovery of the new springs, and the wonderful news of a brilliant future for the place. The people were so excited and enthusiastic that they could not talk or think of anything else. The marquis and Gontran themselves passed their days watching the workmen who tapped the fissures in the granite, and they listened with growing interest to the explanations and instructions of the engineer on the geological structure of Auvergne. And Paul and Christiane were seen together daily without anyone's thinking of them; for everyone's attention, curiosity and interest were wholly absorbed in the future resort.

Christiane had been as a youth who is intoxicated for the first time. The first glass, the first kiss, had scorched her and made her dizzy. She had swallowed the second quickly and found it better, and now she eagerly drained the intoxicating glass.

Since the evening when she had confessed her love to Paul, she was no longer aware of what was going on in the world around her. Time, events, persons, no longer existed for her; nothing existed any longer but one man. There was no longer anything on the earth or in the sky save one man, one man alone. Her eyes saw nothing but him, her mind dwelt only on him, her hopes rested only on him. She lived, moved about, ate, dressed, seemed to listen and reply, without understanding and without knowing what she was doing. No apprehensions haunted her, for no calamity could have touched her. She had become insensible to everything. No physical pain could have had power over her body, which love alone could make tremble. No mental suffering could have touched her soul, which was benumbed with happiness.

Loving her with the intensity that he showed in all his love affairs, he

roused the young woman's affection to frenzy. Often towards the close of the day, when he knew that the marquis and Gontran had gone to the spring, he would say: "Let us go and see our heaven." He called their heaven a pine grove high up on the slope, right above the gorge. They walked up there across a little wood, along a steep footpath that made Christiane quite breathless. As they had only a short time, they walked rapidly, and that she might be less wearied, he supported her with his arm around her waist. Placing one hand on his shoulder, she let herself be carried along, and sometimes she would throw her arms around his neck and touch his lips with hers. As they ascended the slope the air grew more invigorating and when they reached the pine grove the odor of the rosin refreshed them like a breath of the sea.

They sat under the dark trees, she on a grassy knoll, and he lower down, at her feet. The wind among the trees murmured that sweet song of the pines that is almost a wail. The vast plain of Limagne, fading away into the unseen distance, veiled in haze, gave them exactly the same feeling as the ocean. Yes, surely, the sea was there, stretching away before them! They could not doubt it, for its cool breath was wafted to their faces!

If they had lived in a city, their passion, no doubt, would have been different, more cautious, more sensuous, less airy and less romantic. But there, in that green country, whose horizon widened the emotions of the soul, alone, with nothing to distract, to diminish their wakened instinct of love, they had thrown themselves suddenly into a wildly poetic tenderness of ecstasy and fancy. The landscapes around them, the warm breeze, the woods, the fragrant odors of this country, sang to them through all the days and the nights the music of their love. And that music had roused them to frenzy, like the notes of the tambourines and the shrill flutes that drive the whirling dervish to acts of mad unreason.

One evening, as they were going in to dinner, the marquis said all at once:

"Andermatt will be back in four days. Everything is arranged. The rest of us will leave the day after his return. We have been here now a very long time, and it is not well to extend the season at the mineral waters too long."

They were as much astounded as if someone had told them that the world was coming to an end. Neither spoke during the meal, so anxiously were they wondering what would take place. Then they were to be separated in a few days, and could no longer see one another freely. That seemed to them so impossible and so strange that they could not realize it.

Andermatt did, indeed, return at the end of the week. He had sent a telegram ordering two landaus to meet the first train. Christiane, who had not slept at all, harassed by a strange new emotion, a sort of fear of her husband—a fear mingled with anger, of inexplicable dislike and a desire to defy him—had risen at daybreak and was waiting for him. He arrived in the first carriage and was accompanied by three well-dressed men with very deferential manners. The second landau brought four more, who seemed a little beneath the others in social position. The marquis and Gontran were filled with wonder.

The former asked:

"Who are these people?"

"My shareholders. We are going to organize the company this very day and appoint the board of directors at once."

He kissed his wife without speaking to her and scarcely even seeing her, he was so preoccupied, and turning towards the seven gentlemen, who stood respectfully and silently behind him, he said:

"Have them serve you with breakfast, and then take a walk. We will meet again here at noon."

They withdrew in silence, like soldiers obeying orders, and, going up the steps two by two, they disappeared in the hotel.

Gontran, who watched them filing off, asked with a very serious look:

"Where did you pick up your supers?"

The banker smiled:

"They are very good men, moneyed men, capitalists."

And he added, after a pause, with a more evident smile:

"Who look after my business."

Then he went to the notary's to read over the instruments of which he had sent the originals all prepared several days before.

He found there Dr. Latonne, with whom he had lately exchanged several letters. They talked a long time together, in a low voice, in a corner of the office, while the clerks' pens flew over the papers, making a slight noise like insects buzzing.

The meeting to organize the company was set for two o'clock.

The notary's office had been arranged as if for a concert. Two rows of chairs were placed for the shareholders facing the table where Maître Alain was to sit beside his chief clerk. Maître Alain had put on his lawyer's gown in deference to the importance of the business. He was a very little man, a ball of white, stuttering flesh.

Andermatt entered just as two o'clock struck. He was accompanied by the marquis, his brother-in-law, and Brétigny, and was followed by the seven gentlemen whom Gontran called the supers. He had the air of a general. Père Oriol appeared at the same time with Colosse. They seemed uneasy, distrustful as peasants always are when they are going to sign papers. Dr. Latonne was the last to arrive. He had made peace with Andermatt by a complete surrender, preceded by cleverly turned apologies, and followed by an offer of his services without reserve or restrictions.

Then the banker, feeling sure of him, had promised him the envied position of medical inspector of the new establishment.

When everyone had come in, a profound silence reigned.

The notary took the floor.

"Gentlemen, be seated." He said a few words more, but no one heard in the noise of moving the chairs.

Andermatt took up a chair and placed it facing his army, so as to have his eye on everyone, then he said, when he was seated:

"Gentlemen, I have no need to explain to you the matter which brings us together. We will first organize the new company in which you have consented to become shareholders. I must, however, inform you of some details which have caused no little difficulty. Before undertaking anything it was essential to be convinced that we could

obtain the authorization necessary in order to develop a new establishment for the use of the public. I now have that assurance. What remains to be done in that connection I will do. I have the minister's promise. But I was delayed by another point. We are going, gentlemen, to fight against the old company of the waters of Enval. We will come out victors in this strife, victors and rich, you may be sure of that. But as the warriors of old needed a war-cry, so we who are fighting in modern warfare need a name for our resort. It must be a musical, attractive name, well adapted for advertising, one which will strike the ear like the note of a clarion, and catch the eye like a lightning flash. Now, gentlemen, we are at Enval and we cannot rename the place. The only thing for us to do is to give our establishment, just our establishment, a new name.

"That is what I propose.

"If our bathing-house is situated at the foot of the knoll which is owned by M. Oriol, who is present here, our future casino should be placed on the crest of the same knoll. Then we could say that this hill, this mountain—for it is a low mountain—is the site of our establishment, since we own the foot and the summit. For this reason, isn't it natural to call our baths the baths of Mont-Oriol? Thus we will associate with the resort, which is destined to become one of the most important in the whole world, the name of its original owner. Let us render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.

"And notice, gentlemen, that this name is very well adapted for the purpose. People will say Mont-Oriol just as they say Mont-Doré. It impresses the eye and lingers in the ear. One reads it at a glance, catches the sound readily, and it stays in one's memory. Mont-Oriol! Mont-Oriol! The baths of Mont-Oriol!"

And Andermatt made the word ring, hurling it out like a cannon-ball, and listening to the echo.

He continued, imitating dialogues:

"Are you going to the baths of Mont-Oriol?"

"Yes, madame, they say they are perfectly wonderful, the mineral waters of Mont-Oriol."

"They are, indeed, splendid. Mont-Oriol, besides, is a lovely place."

And he smiled, and acted as if he were chatting, changing his tone of voice when the lady spoke, and raising his hand in salute to indicate the gentleman.

Then he resumed in his natural voice:

"Has anyone any objection to make?"

The shareholders answered in chorus:

"No, none."

Three of the supers applauded.

Père Oriol, touched, flattered, captivated, and completely won over by this appeal to the innate pride of the *parvenu* peasant, smiled as he turned his hat in his hands, and nodded "yes." In spite of himself it was a "yes" that revealed his delight and which Andermatt observed without seeming to be watching.

Colosse remained impassive, but was as well pleased as his father. Then Andermatt said to the notary:

"Will you kindly read the document for the incorporation of the company, Maître Alain?"

And he sat down.

The notary said to his clerk:

"Go on, Marinet."

Marinet, who was a poor consumptive, coughed, and then intoning like a priest, and with great attempts at elocution, began to enumerate the statutes relating to the incorporation of an anonymous company, called the Company of the Hot Springs establishment of Mont-Oriol, at Enval, with a capitalization of two millions.

Père Oriol interrupted him.

"One moment, one moment," he said. And he drew from his pocket a greasy paper that for eight days past had made the rounds of all the lawyers and business men of that section of the country. It was a copy of the statutes which he and his son would soon know by heart.

Then he slowly placed his spectacles on his nose, and, raising his head, adjusted the paper so that he could see distinctly, and said:

"Go ahead, Marinet."

Colosse, who had drawn up his chair, also looked over his father's paper.

And Marinet began over again. The older Oriol, distracted by the double effort of listening and reading at once, tortured, too, by the fear that one word might be changed, filled also with the desire to see whether Andermatt did not make any secret sign to the notary, did not let more than one line pass without stopping the clerk ten times and interrupting all his attempts at oratory.

He asked:

"You say? What was that you said then? I did not catch it! Not so fast!"

Then turning slightly towards his son, he asked:

"Is that right, Colosse?"

Colosse, more self-possessed, answered:

"It's all right, father, let him go on, let him go on, it's all right!"

The peasant felt no confidence. With the end of his crooked finger, he followed along on the paper, muttering the words under his breath. But he could not fix his attention on the two things at once; when he listened, he could not read any more, and when he read, he could not listen at all. He panted as if he had climbed up a mountain, he perspired as if he had been digging his vineyard in the hot sun, and from time to time he asked for several minutes' rest, to wipe his forehead and get his breath, like a man fighting a duel.

Andermatt, losing patience, tapped the floor with his foot. Gontran saw the copy of the *Moniteur du Puy-de-Dome* lying on a table and took it to read. Paul, sitting astride his chair, with bent head and shrinking heart, was thinking that this little, rosy-cheeked man who sat in front of him was going on the next day to take away the woman that he loved with his whole soul, Christiane, his Christiane, his fair Christiane, who was his, wholly his, and only his. And he was wondering whether he himself would not carry her away that very evening.

The seven gentlemen sat there serious and patient.

At the close of an hour it was finished. The papers were signed.

The notary drew up certificate of payments. When he was called upon, the cashier, M. Abraham Levy, stated that he had received the funds. The company, thus legally organized, at once called a general meeting, as all the shareholders were present, to nominate the board of directors and elect the president.

All the votes except two were in

favor of Andermatt as president. The two dissenting votes, of the peasant and his son, had nominated Oriol. Brétigny was made inspecting commissioner.

Then the board, composed of MM. Andermatt, the marquis, and the Count of Ravenel, Brétigny, the Oriols, father and son, Dr. Latonne, Abraham Levy, and Simon Zidler, requested the rest of the shareholders to withdraw as well as the notary and his clerk, so that they could deliberate over the first resolutions and arrange the more important points.

Andermatt rose again.

"Gentlemen, we are entering on the vital question, that of success, which we must win at all costs.

"With mineral waters it is just as with everything else. They must be talked about everywhere and on all occasions, so as to get invalids to drink them.

"The great problem of modern times, gentlemen, is advertising. But the art of advertising is difficult, complex, and calls for the greatest tact. Those who first adopted this new method used it crudely and attracted much attention by noise, beating drums and firing cannon. Mangin, gentlemen, was only a pioneer. To-day sensational methods are regarded with suspicion, striking placards provoke only smiles, names shouted in the streets rouse more distrust than interest. Yet we must gain the attention of the public, and when we have caught it, we must hold it. The art thus lies in discovering a method, the sole method that will succeed, depending on what we have for sale. Now we, gentlemen, want to sell water. Therefore, it is through doctors that we must secure the invalids.

"The most celebrated doctors, gentlemen, are men like ourselves, who, like ourselves, have weaknesses. I do not wish to imply that they could be bribed. The reputation of the masters of the profession of whom we have need places them beyond all suspicion of graft. But what man is there whom one cannot win, if one sets about it in the right way? Just as there are women who cannot be bought, but must be won by fascination.

"This, then, gentlemen, is the proposition that I would like to place before you, after having talked it over for a long time with Dr. Latonne.

"We have first classified in three principal groups the diseases that can be benefited by our treatment. They are: first, rheumatism in all its forms, skin disease, arthritis, gout, etc., etc.; second, disorders of the stomach, alimentary tract, and liver; third, all diseases arising from disturbances of the circulation—for it is an indisputable fact that our carbonated baths have a wonderful effect on the circulation.

"Furthermore, gentlemen, the marvellous cure of Père Clovis foretells miracles.

"Then after classifying the diseases that call for these waters, we will make the following proposition to the leading specialists in those diseases: 'Gentlemen,' we will say, 'come and see, come and see with your own eyes, and watch the effects on your own patients, we invite you to come as our guests. The country round is superb, you need relaxation after your hard winter's work. Come. And come, learned doctors, not to our homes but to your own, for we offer you each a chalet, which will be yours if you wish it, on exceptionally

good terms.'"

Andermatt took a moment's rest and resumed in a calmer tone:

"This is the way that I have worked out this idea. We have chosen six plots of land, each of a thousand meters. On all these six lots the Bernese Company of Portable Chalets have agreed to erect a model house. We then, gratuitously, place these villas, which will be as elegant as they are comfortable, at the disposal of our physicians. If they are pleased with them, they will only have to buy the houses from the Bernese Company, for as far as the land is concerned we will give it to them . . . and they will pay us . . . in invalids. In this way, gentlemen, we shall reap many advantages. We will cover our land with charming villas that will cost us nothing, we will attract the leading physicians of the world, and their legion of patients, and, above all, we shall convince these eminent doctors, who will soon become property owners in the place, of the efficacy of our mineral waters. As far as regards all the negotiations leading to these results, I will be responsible for them, gentlemen, and I will conduct them not as a speculator but as a man of the world."

Père Oriol interrupted him. His parsimony, characteristic of Auvergne, was roused at the project of giving away the land.

Andermatt then burst into oratory. He compared the noble agriculturist who casts the seed by handfuls upon the fertile soil, to the avaricious peasant who counts the grains and never reaps more than half a harvest.

Then as Oriol, who was vexed at this, grew obstinate in his objections, the banker put the matter before the board and closed the old man's mouth with a vote of six to two.

Then he opened a large morocco portfolio and drew out the plans of the new establishment, of the hotel and the casino. With them were also the estimates of the builders and contracts all ready to be approved and signed at the present session of the board. The work was to begin at the opening of the following week.

The two Oriols, alone, wished to look over these papers and to discuss them. But Andermatt, quite out of patience, said: "Am I asking you for any money? No! Then leave me in peace! And if you are not satisfied, we will take another vote."

Then they signed the papers with the other members of the board and the session was over.

All the village was waiting to see them come out, so great was the excitement. The people bowed to them respectfully. As the two peasants were going home, Andermatt said to them: "Do not forget that we all dine together at the hotel. And be sure to bring your daughters—I have brought them some little gifts from Paris."

They were to meet at seven o'clock, in the reception room of the Grand Hotel.

It was a large dinner party to which the banker had invited the more prominent bathers and the village authorities. Christiane presided, the curé sitting at her right and the mayor at her left.

Nothing was talked of but the new establishment and the future prospects of the place. The two Oriol girls had found under their napkins two jewel boxes containing bracelets, set with

pearls and emeralds. The girls were wild with delight and talked more brightly than they had ever done before with Gontran, who sat between them. Even the elder laughed with all her heart at the young man's jokes, for he chatted with them with great animation.

Paul ate nothing and said nothing. He felt as if his life were going to end that evening. All at once he remembered that just a month had passed, day by day, since their picnic at the lake of Tazenat. His soul was filled with a vague pain, made up more of presentiments than regrets, presentiments known only to lovers. This is the suffering that makes the heart so heavy, the nerves so tense that the least noise harasses them, and the mind so wretchedly sad that everything we hear takes on a mournful sound corresponding with our fixed idea.

The moment that they left the table he joined Christiane in the drawing-room.

"I must see you this evening," he said, "very soon, immediately, for I do not know when we can be together alone again. Do you realize that it is just a month to-day?"

She answered:

"I know."

He continued:

"Listen, I will wait for you on the road to Roche-Pradière, near the village, under the chestnut trees. No one will notice your absence just now. Come quickly to bid me farewell, for to-morrow we part."

She whispered:

"I will be there in a quarter of an hour."

Then he went out to escape from the crowd of people which he felt he could no longer bear to be among.

He took the footpath across the vineyards that they had followed one day, the day when they had for the first time looked together at the view of Limagne. Soon he gained the highway. He was alone, and he felt himself absolutely alone, alone in all the world. The vast pain, shrouded in darkness, intensified this feeling of isolation. He paused at the very spot where they had sat, where he had recited to her the verses of Baudelaire on Beauty. How far away that seemed, already! Then he recalled in memory everything that had happened, hour by hour, afterwards. Never before had he been so happy, never! Never before had he loved so madly, yet so purely, so devotedly. And he thought of the evening on the lake of Tazenat, just a month ago that very day—the cool wood, flecked with pale moonlight, the little lake of silver, and the huge fish that lightly touched the surface. Then he thought of the return home, when he had seen her walking before him, through the shadows of the light, under the rays of moonlight that fell through the leaves of the trees on her hair, on her shoulders, and on her arms. Those were the sweetest moments that he had ever tasted in his life.

He turned to see if she was not coming. He did not see her, but he saw the moon that had risen above the horizon. The same moon that had risen over his first avowal, was now rising for his first farewell.

A shiver ran over him, an icy shiver. Autumn was at hand—autumn that presages winter. He had not felt until this moment the first touch of cold, which pierced him keenly, like a menace of misfortune.

The white, dusty road stretched out before him like a river between its steep banks. Suddenly, a figure appeared at the turn of the road. He knew her at once, and he stood waiting without moving, trembling with the mysterious happiness of feeling her draw near, of seeing her coming to him, for his sake.

She came with hesitating steps, not daring to call him, anxious at not having found him, for he stayed hidden under a tree, and awed by the profound silence, and by the moonlit solitude of the earth and sky. And in front of her, her shadow moved on, black and gigantic, reaching far ahead of her, and seeming to carry to him something of her.

Christiane stopped and the shadow also became motionless, lying prostrate on the road.

Paul took several quick steps up to where the head stretched itself in rounded shadows on the road. Then as though he would lose no part of her, he knelt down and prostrating himself on the ground, pressed his lips to the edge of the dark silhouette.

She was surprised and even a little frightened, and waited until he was at her feet before she gathered courage to speak to him. Then when he raised his head while he still knelt, but clasped her in his arms, she said:

"What is the matter with you this evening?"

He answered:

"Ivy, I am going to lose you!"

She pushed her fingers through his thick hair, and bent over him while she held back his forehead to kiss his eyes.

"Why lose me?" she said, smiling and confident.

"Because to-morrow we shall part."

"Part from one another? For such a little while, dear."

"One never knows. We shall never find again the days that we have passed here."

"We shall have others as beautiful and happy."

She raised him up and drew him under the tree where he had waited for her, and made him sit near her, lower down so that she might still caress his hair with her hand. She talked to him seriously, as a woman, who was thoughtful, ardent and determined, who had already foreseen everything, who knew by instinct what must be done, and is resolved on all.

"Listen, my darling, I am very free in Paris. William never bothers about me. His business satisfies him."

But he repeated with his head bent down resting on his knees and his arm around her waist:

"Ivy, Ivy, I shall lose you! I feel that I shall lose you!"

She grew impatient at this unreasoning regret, of such childish regret in this powerful body, while she who was so fragile compared with him was yet so confident, so sure that nothing could part them.

He whispered:

"If you wished it, we would run away together, we would go very far, to a beautiful land of flowers where we would love one another. Tell me, do you wish that we might go this evening, do you wish it?"

But she shrugged her shoulders, a little nervous, a little vexed that he had not listened to her, for it was no longer a time for dreams and tender weakness. The hour had come for her to show energy and prudence.

He did not move, and kissed her dress while she caressed his face with her light and tender touch.

But suddenly, she said:

"We must go back, or they will notice our absence."

They parted with a long embrace. Then she went back, first, running so as to reach the hotel sooner, while he watched her as she disappeared in the distance—sad as if all his happiness and all his hopes had fled with her.

PART II

CHAPTER I

BLESSING THE SPRINGS

One would scarcely have recognized the hot springs resort at Enval on the first of July of the succeeding year.

On the crest of the knoll between the two entrances to the valley rose a building constructed in the Moorish style of architecture, which bore on its front façade, in letters of gold, the word "Casino."

The little woodland, on the slope towards Limagne, had been made into a little park. A terrace, bounded by a wall ornamented from one end to the other with great vases of imitation marble, extended in front of the building and commanded a view of the great plain of Auvergne.

Lower down, among the vineyards, six chalets, here and there, showed their façades of polished wood.

An immense white building, on the southern slope, attracted from far and wide, the attention of travellers who could see it as soon as they left Riom. This was the Grand Hotel of Mont-Oriol. And directly below it, at the very foot of the hill, a square building of simpler style, but very spacious, surrounded by a garden that was traversed by the brook that issued from the gorge, offered to the invalids the wonderful cures promised in a prospectus by Dr. Latonne. One read on the façade, "Thermal baths of Mont-Oriol." Then, on the right wing, in smaller letters, "Hydropathy. — Stomach lavage. — Piscina with running water." And on the left wing, "Medical institute of automatic gymnastics."

Everything was white, a new, crude, shining white. Workmen were still busy; and painters, plumbers, and laborers were at work, although the establishment had now been open for a month.

While the baths had been finished since the first days of June, the official opening of the resort had been deferred until the first of July, with the hope of attracting a great many people. The fête was to begin at three o'clock. It would open with the ceremony of blessing the springs. In the evening there was to be a grand entertainment, including fireworks and a ball. This would bring together all the bathers of this and the neighboring resorts, and the leading citi-

zens of Clermont-Ferrand and Riom.

The casino at the crest of the hill was hidden in flags. One saw only masses of blue, red, white and yellow, that formed a dense, fluttering cloud. From the tops of the tall poles placed all along the park walks, enormous oriflammes waved against the blue sky with snake-like undulations.

M. Petrus Martel, who had been appointed to the management of this new casino, imagined that he had become, under this cloud of flags, the invincible commander of some fantastic vessel, and he gave orders to the white-aproned waiters, in a resounding and terrifying voice, such as admirals must use in giving commands under fire. His ringing words, borne on the winds, were heard all the way to the village.

Andermatt, already breathless, appeared on the terrace. Petrus Martel ran to meet him, and saluted him with a grand bow and a stately gesture of the hand.

"Is everything going on all right?" asked the banker.

"Everything is all right, Monsieur le President."

"If I am needed, I can be found at the medical inspector's office. We have a meeting there this morning."

Then he went down the hill. In front of the door of the establishment the superintendent and the cashier—who had also been captured from the old company that had now become the rival concern, but whose end was certain without any struggle being even possible—rushed forward to meet their chief. The ex-jailer made a military salute. The cashier bowed like a beggar receiving alms.

Andermatt inquired:

"Is the inspector here?"

The superintendent replied:

"Yes, Monsieur le President, all the gentlemen have come."

The banker entered the vestibule, among a crowd of women bathing attendants and respectful waiters, turned to the right and opened a door. There, in a large room, with the air of a study, full of books and busts of scientific men, he saw gathered all the members of the board of directors who were then in Enval. They were: his father-in-law, the marquis, Gontran, his brother-in-law, the Oriols, father and son—who looked quite like gentlemen, and were dressed in such long frock coats and they themselves were so tall that they looked like advertisements of some mourning goods concern—Paul Brétigny, and Dr. Latonne.

They shook hands quickly, then took their seats and Andermatt addressed them:

"An important question remains for us to settle, that is, naming the springs. My idea on this subject is quite different from that of the inspector. The doctor proposes to give to our three principal springs the names of the three leaders of the medical profession who are here. It is true that this would be a delicate bit of flattery that would please them and would win them over to our side still more firmly. But, you may be sure, gentlemen, that this would alienate from us forever all their eminent colleagues who have not yet responded to our invitation, and whom we must convince of the sovereign efficacy of our springs at the cost of every effort and at every sacrifice.

"I therefore propose to you that we should simply give my wife's name to

the first spring that was discovered, and the names of the Mlles. Oriol to the other two. Then we would have the Christiane, Louise and Charlotte springs. That sounds very well, it's very nice. What do you say to it?"

His suggestion was adopted even by Dr. Latonne who added:

"Then we might invite MM. Mas-Roussel, Cloche, and Remusot to be the godfathers and to offer their arms to the godmothers."

"That's perfect, perfect!" said Andermatt. "I will run right over to see them. They will accept. I am sure, they will accept. Then you will all be at three o'clock at the church where the procession will form."

And he left in great haste.

The marquis and Gontran followed him almost at once. The two Oriols, wearing tall hats, walked out in their turn, side by side, solemn and all in black on the white road. Dr. Latonne said to Paul who had just come the night before so as to be present at the fête:

"I detained you, my dear sir, to show you something from which I expect miracles. It is my medical institute of automatic gymnastics."

He took his arm, and led him on. But they had scarcely entered the hallway when one of the bath attendants stopped the doctor.

"Monsieur Riquier is waiting for his lavage."

Dr. Latonne, the year before had spoken ill of the stomach lavages that were so lauded and practiced by Dr. Bonnefille in the establishment of which he was the inspector. But time had altered his opinion and the "Baraduc tube" had become the great instrument of torture of the new inspector, who thrust it down everyone's throat with boyish delight.

He asked Paul Brétigny:

"Have you ever had a chance to see that little operation?"

The other replied:

"No, never."

"Come and see it then, my dear fellow, it is very curious."

They went into the shower bath room where M. Riquier, the man with the brick-red complexion, was waiting sitting on a wooden arm-chair. He was trying the effects this year of the newly discovered springs, as he had tried every summer those of all the new resorts.

Like some criminal of ancient times awaiting execution, he was swathed and half strangled in a sort of a strait-waistcoat of oil-cloth that was designed to preserve his clothing from spots and spatters. He wore the wretched, anxious, pained expression of patients on whom a surgeon is going to operate.

The moment that the doctor appeared, the attendant seized a long tube, divided into three near the middle, and thus which resembling a thin double-tailed snake. Then the man attached one of these ends to a little faucet that was connected with the spring. The second end was left hanging in a glass receptacle into which the rejected contents of the stomach should later flow. Then the inspector took with a firm hand the third branch of the tube, and approached M. Riquier with a pleasant air. He passed the tube into the patient's mouth, and directing it skillfully, slid it down his throat, forcing it down deeper and deeper with his thumb and first finger, with a gracious and benevolent air, repeating meanwhile: "Very

good, very good, very good. That will do, that will do, that will do, that will do perfectly."

M. Riquier, with his eyes staring wildly, his cheeks purple, his lips covered with foam, gasped, choked, and gave agonized hiccoughs. Then, bound as he was to the arms of the chair, he made desperate efforts to reject the beastly rubber tube that was penetrating into his body.

When he had swallowed about half a meter, the doctor said:

"We are at the bottom. Turn on the faucet."

The attendant turned on the water, and soon the invalid's stomach began to swell visibly, as it was gradually filled with the tepid water from the spring.

"Cough," said the doctor, "cough to aid the descent of the water."

Instead of coughing, the poor wretch had a rattling in his throat, and shaken with convulsions, he looked as if his eyes would pop out of his head. Then suddenly a slight gurgling was heard on the floor near his arm-chair. The siphon of the triple tube had begun to act, and the stomach was now emptied into the glass vessel, in which the doctor searched with interest for indications of catarrh and for traces of imperfect digestion.

"You must never eat any more peas, or salad! Oh! no salad! You don't digest it at all. No strawberries, either! I have already told you ten times, no strawberries!"

M. Riquier seemed to be furiously angry. He worked himself up into a state of excitement without being able to speak with the tube gagging him. But when the lavage was over, and the doctor had skillfully drawn out this plummet from his insides, he exclaimed:

"Is it my fault if I eat salads every day that destroy my health? Isn't it your duty to supervise the menus of your hotel manager? I came to your new miserable eating place because they were poisoning me with abominable food at the old one, but on my word! I am worse off in your great barracks of an inn at Mont-Oriol."

The doctor had to calm him, and promised over and over again that he would take the invalid's table under his supervision.

Then he took Paul Brétigny's arm once more, and led him on. He said:

"These are the very rational principles on which my special treatment of automatic gymnastics that we are going to inspect, is based. You are familiar with my system of organometric medicine, are you not? I hold that a great many of our diseases arise simply from the excessive development of one organ that impinges on the neighboring organ, so as to hinder its functions, and thus destroys the general harmony of the body which is the source of most serious disorders.

"Now, exercise, combined with shower baths and thermal treatment, is the most vigorous method of re-establishing this equilibrium, and of reducing the encroaching parts to their normal condition.

"But how are we to persuade people to exercise? There is not only a considerable physical exertion in walking, or riding, or swimming, or rowing, but there is also a still greater moral effort. It is the mind that decides, carries on, and sustains the actions of the body. Men of energy are men of action! Now energy is in the spirit and not in the

muscles. The body obeys the active will.

"Now we cannot even dream of giving courage to the cowardly nor determination to the weak. But we can do something else, we can do more, we can take out of consideration courage, mental energy, and moral effort, and yet obtain the physical movements. I advantageously substitute for the moral effort, a foreign and purely mechanical force. Do you understand? No, not very clearly. Let us go in and see."

He opened a door that led into a long hall in which were rows of strange looking instruments. There were great arm-chairs with artificial wooden legs, horses made of rough pine wood, jointed boards, movable bars stretched in front of chairs that were fastened to the floor. And all these objects were connected with complicated machinery that was set in motion by winches.

The doctor resumed:

"We have four principal forms of exercise that I will call the natural exercises. They are walking, riding, swimming and rowing. Each of these exercises develops different parts and has a particular effect. Now we have all four here, artificially produced. One has simply to relax, and without thinking about it, one can run, ride, swim, or row, for an hour, without the mind's taking the slightest part in this purely muscular work."

At that moment, M. Aubry-Pasteur came in, followed by a man whose sleeves were rolled up and showed the strong biceps muscles of his arms. The engineer had grown still fatter. He walked with his arms and legs spread wide from his body, and panted.

The doctor said:

"You will learn by watching."

And turning to his patient, he said:

"Well, my dear sir, what shall we do to-day? Shall it be walking or riding?"

M. Aubry-Pasteur, who shook hands with Paul, replied:

"I will walk a little seated, that fatigues me less."

M. Latonne resumed:

"We have, indeed, both walking seated, and walking standing. Walking standing, while more efficacious, is rather trying. I effect it by means of pedals on which you stand and which keep the limbs in motion while you keep upright by grasping rings secured to the wall. But this is the method of walking seated."

The engineer had sunk down in a rocking-chair. He placed his legs in the movable, wooden, jointed legs that were attached to the chair. His legs and ankles were strapped so that he could not make any voluntary movement. Then the man with his sleeves rolled up, grasped the crank and turned it with all his strength. The arm-chair first rocked like a hammock, then the legs started up, stretching out and bending back, going and coming with great speed.

"He is running," said the doctor, who gave the order. "Gently, go at a walk."

The attendant slackened the speed, and made the fat engineer go at a more moderate sitting walk, which distorted the movements of his body in a ludicrous way.

Two other invalids then came in, both of them enormous. They were also followed by bare-armed attendants.

They hoisted them up on the wooden horses. These were set in motion and at once began to gallop where they

stood, and shook up their cavaliers in a frightful manner.

"Gallop!" shouted the doctor. And the make believe animals, leaping up like waves and capsizing like ships, so exhausted the two patients that they began to cry out, both together, in gasping and pitiful voices: "Enough! Enough! I can't stand any more! Enough!"

The doctor ordered: "Stop!" Then he added:

"Get your breath a little. You will begin again in five minutes."

Paul Brétigny, who was bursting with a desire to laugh, remarked that the riders weren't warm at all, while the men who turned the winches were perspiring.

"Wouldn't it be better if you exchanged the rôles?"

The doctor answered, gravely:

"Oh, not at all, my dear sir! You must not confound exercise with fatigue. The motion of the man who turns the crank is not beneficial, while the motion of the one who is walking or riding is excellent."

But Paul saw a woman's saddle.

"Yes," said the doctor, "the afternoon is reserved for the ladies. Gentlemen are not admitted after twelve. Now come and watch the dry swimming."

A system of movable boards, screwed together at their ends and centers, which could be stretched out in lozenge form or closed up into squares—like the children's game that carries soldiers who are spurred along—was so arranged that three swimmers could be simultaneously garroted and quartered.

The doctor said:

"I do not need to laud to you the advantages of dry swimming that does not moisten the body, except with perspiration, and consequently does not expose our hypothetical bather to any chance of rheumatism."

But an attendant came to find him, with a card in his hand.

"The Duke of Ramas, my dear fellow, I must leave you. Excuse me."

Paul, left alone, looked around him. The two riders were trotting again. M. Aubry-Pasteur was still walking, and the three attendants, who were from Auvergne, were panting, with their arms and backs nearly broken from shaking up the patients. They looked as if they were grinding coffee.

When he went out of doors, Brétigny saw Dr. Honorat and his wife looking at the preparations for the celebration. They began to chat together, gazing up at the flags that made a halo around the hill.

"Does the procession form at the church?" asked the doctor's wife.

"Yes, at the church."

"At three o'clock?"

"At three o'clock."

"The professors will be there?"

"Yes, they will escort the ladies who will christen the springs."

Then the Paille ladies stopped him. And after that the Monécus, father and daughter. But as he was to lunch tête-à-tête with his friend Gontran, at the casino café, he walked slowly in that direction. Paul, who had come the night before, had not seen his chum for a confidential chat for a month, and he had lots of stories of the boulevards, stories of girls and gaming-houses.

They had stayed on gossiping until half-past two, when Petrus Martel warned them that it was time for them

to go to the church.

"Let's go and find Christiane," said Gontran.

"Yes, let's go," said Paul.

They found her standing on the steps of the new hotel. Her hollow cheeks, sallow complexion, and figure betrayed her condition.

"I was waiting for you," she said. "William has gone on ahead. He had so many things to attend to to-day."

She raised her eyes to Paul Brétigny with a look full of tenderness, and took his arm.

They started quietly along on their way, avoiding the stones. She said:

"Oh, how badly I feel! How badly I feel! I dread to walk, I am so afraid of falling."

He did not reply, and supported her carefully, without meeting her eyes that she turned constantly to him.

A dense crowd was waiting in front of the church.

Andermatt cried: "At last you've come. Hurry up! See, this is the order of the procession: two choir boys, two precentors in surplices, the cross, holy water, the priest, then Christiane with Professor Cloche, Mlle. Louise with Professor Remusot, and Mlle. Charlotte with Professor Mas-Roussel. Immediately after them come the board of directors, the medical staff, then the public. It's understood. Forward!"

The religious members of the procession then came out from the church and took their places at the head. Then a tall gentleman, with long white hair hanging down below his ears, a typical *savant*, after the academic style, approached Madame Andermatt with a deep bow.

When he had straightened up, he started off in the procession beside her, with his head bare and holding his hat in his hand, so as to show his fine scientific locks of hair. His gait was very imposing, as if he had learned it at the Comédie-Française, and wished to display before the crowd his decoration of an officer of the Legion of Honor, which was too big for a modest man.

He said:

"Your husband, madame, was just talking to me about your health which gives him some anxiety. He has told me your doubts and feelings of uncertainty."

She blushed to her temples.

A voice behind them said:

"This resort has a great future. I have already obtained surprising results."

It was Professor Remusot talking to his companion, Louise Oriol. He was a little man, that one, with yellow unkempt hair, a badly cut frock coat, and the dirty look of a slovenly scientist.

Professor Mas-Roussel, who offered his arm to Charlotte Oriol, was a fine-looking doctor, smooth-shaven, smiling, well-kept, hardly gray at all, a trifle stout, whose shaven face did not look like that of a priest or of an actor, as did Dr. Latonne's.

The board of directors followed immediately behind, led by Andermatt, and towered over by the huge hats of the two Oriols.

Behind them was still another group of silk hats, the medical staff of Enval, from among whom Dr. Bonnefille was missing. His place was taken by two new doctors, Dr. Black, an old man who was very short, almost a dwarf,

whose excessive piety had surprised the whole place, from the very day of his arrival, and a very handsome young man, a great flirt, who wore a little cap. He was Dr. Mazelli, an Italian attaché of the staff of the Duke of Ramas, or, as others said, of the staff of the duchess.

And behind them came the public, a great crowd of people, of bathers, peasants, and citizens of neighboring towns.

The blessing of the springs was a very short ceremony. Abbé Litre sprinkled them, one after another, with holy water, which made Dr. Honorat remark that he would give them new properties with chloride of sodium. Then all the special guests entered the large reading-room where a collation was served.

Paul said to Gontran:

"How pretty the little Oriol girls have grown!"

"They are charming, my dear fellow."

"Have you seen Monsieur le President," the ex-jailer suddenly asked the young men.

"Yes, he is in the corner over there."

"Père Clovis is gathering a crowd in front of the door."

The whole procession on the way to the blessing of the springs, had already filed past the old invalid, who had been cured the year before and had now returned more paralyzed than ever. He stopped the strangers on the roads and the last-comers by preference to tell them his story.

"Let me tell you, that water is no good. It cures you, that's true, but you relapse and after the relapse you're half-dead. Now, I had legs that could walk a little, but now, see how I am losing the use of my arms as a result of the cure. And my legs are iron, but iron that must be cut before it will bend."

Andermatt, in despair, had tried to have him put in jail on the charge of malicious injury to the waters of Mont-Oriol, and for attempts at extortion. But he had been unable to obtain a conviction, nor to stop the old rascal's talk.

As soon as he heard that he was tattling at the door of the establishment, he rushed out to make him keep still.

He heard two angry voices, in the middle of a crowd, on the edge of the main road. Everyone was pressing forward to hear and to see. The ladies asked: "What is it?" The men answered: "It's a sick man that the waters here have finished." Others thought that a child had been crushed to death. It was also rumored that a poor woman had fallen in an attack of apoplexy.

Andermatt burst through the crowd. Père Clovis sitting on the curbstone, whined out his sufferings, and sniveled, while the two Oriols stood between him and the crowd. Father and son were exasperated and insulted and threatened him at the tops of their voices.

"It's not true," cried Colosse, "he's a liar, a fake, a poacher who hunts all night through the woods."

But the old rascal, without being disturbed in the least, kept repeating in a high piercing voice that could be heard above the vociferations of the two men:

"They have killed me, my good sirs, they have killed me with their spring. They bathed me in it by force last year. And look at me now, this moment, look at me now, look at me now!"

Andermatt imposed silence on everyone, then bending down over the help-

less man, and looking into the depths of his eyes, said:

"If you are worse, it is your own fault, do you understand that? But if you listen to me, I will promise to cure you in fifteen or twenty baths at most. Come and see me an hour from now at the establishment, when everyone will have gone, and we will arrange that, uncle. And meantime, hold your tongue."

The old rascal understood. He was silent, then after a pause, he said:

"I am always ready to give it a trial. You'll see."

Andermatt took the Oriols by the arms and led them quickly away. Père Clovis lay stretched out on the grass, with his crutches beside him, on the roadside, and blinked in the sunshine.

The curious crowd pressed around him. Gentlemen asked him questions, but he no longer answered, and acted as if he had not heard or did not understand. Then all this curiosity, which he could no longer turn to account, ended by boring him, and he began to sing, bare-headed, in a voice as much out of tune as it was harsh—an interminable song in unintelligible patois.

And the crowd gradually dispersed. Only a few children stayed a long time watching him, with their fingers on their noses.

Christiane, who was very tired, had gone back to rest. Paul and Gontran walked in the new park among the visitors. All at once they saw the group of actors that had also deserted from the old casino to join the growing fortunes of the new.

Mlle. Odelin, who had become very fashionable, was walking arm in arm with her mother, who had assumed an air of importance. M. Petit-Nivelle of the Vaudeville seemed very attentive to these ladies. Behind them was M. Lapalme of the Grand Theater of Bordeaux, who was arguing with the old staff of musicians, the *maëstro* Saint-Landri, the pianist Javel, the flutist Noirot, and the double-bass Nicordi.

When he saw Paul and Gontran, Saint-Landri rushed to them. During the winter he had had a little operetta played in a small, out-of-the-way theater, but the newspapers had reviewed it rather favorably, and now he treated MM. Massenet, Reyer, and Gounod scornfully.

He stretched out both hands in friendly greeting, and then began to repeat his discussion with the members of the orchestra that he conducted.

"Yes, my dear sir, it's all finished, finished, finished, with the old school and their threadbare repetitions. The melodists have had their day. This is what people don't want to believe.

"Music is a new art. Melody is only its first lisping. The uncultivated ear has always loved refrains, and takes in them the delight of a child, the pleasure of a savage. I may add that the ears of the people, or of the unsophisticated public will always love simple songs, that is, melodies. It is an amusement similar to that of the habitués of café concerts.

"I will use a comparison to make my meaning clear. The eye of the rustic loves crude colors and striking pictures. The eye of the educated, middle-class citizen, who, however, is not an artist, delights in shades that are harmoniously bright and in sentimental subjects. But the eye of the artist, the trained eye, loves, appreciates and distinguishes, the

almost imperceptible modulations of the same tone, the mysterious harmony of shades that are invisible to all the rest of the world.

"It's the same in literature. Janitors enjoy tales of adventure, ordinary people like novels that stir their emotions, while the true men of letters care only for the artistic books which are incomprehensible to others.

"When a middle-class citizen speaks to me of music, I feel like killing him. And when we are at the opera, I ask: 'Can you tell me whether the third violin played a false note in the overture of the third act?' 'No.' 'Then keep still. You have no ear.' The man who cannot listen to the music of an orchestra as a whole and yet, at the same time, distinguish the separate instruments has no ear, and is not a musician. So there you are! Good-night!"

He turned on his heel, then resumed: "To an artist all the power of music lies in a single chord. Ah, my dear friends, some chords madden me, they make a flood of indescribable happiness rush over me."

He rubbed his hands with rapture, and he chanted: "You shall hear my opera—my opera—my opera. You shall hear my opera."

Gontran asked:

"Are you composing an opera?"

"Yes, I have finished it."

But the voice of Petrus Martel resounded in command:

"You understand perfectly! It's agreed on—a yellow rocket and off you go!"

He was giving directions about the fireworks. They joined him, and he explained about his arrangements, showing with outstretched arm, as if he were defying a fleet of the enemy, the white stakes on the mountain, above the gorge, on the opposite side of the valley.

"It is from there that they will be set off. I will direct the man who is to attend to it, to be at his post not later than half-past nine. As soon as the entertainment is over, I will give the signal from here by a yellow rocket, and then he will set off the first piece."

The marquis appeared.

"I am going to drink a glass of water," said he.

Paul and Gontran went with him, and again descended the hill. When they arrived at the establishment, they saw Père Clovis going in, supported by the two Oriols. He was followed by Andermatt and the doctor, and every time he dragged his legs along the floor, he made fearful contortions of pain.

"Let us go in," said Gontran, "this will be fun."

They seated the paralytic in a chair, then Andermatt said to him:

"This is my proposition, you old swindler. You are to be cured immediately by taking two baths a day. And you shall have two hundred francs as soon as you walk——"

The paralytic began to groan.

"My legs, they are iron, my good monchieu."

Andermatt made him hold his tongue, then continued:

"Listen to me now. And you will have two hundred francs more every year until your death—you understand? —until your death, if you continue to experience good results from our springs."

The old man was perplexed. A permanent cure upset all his plans of life.

He asked, hesitatingly:

"But when—when it's closed—your box here—if this takes me again—I can do nothing—alone—seeing that it's closed—your springs——"

Dr. Latonne interrupted him, and turning towards Andermatt, he exclaimed:

"Splendid—splendid. We will cure him every year—that's better still and will prove the need of annual treatment, that it's indispensable to return. That's perfect! It's agreed!"

But the old fellow objected again:

"It won't be so easy this time, my good sirs. My legs are iron, bars of iron——"

The doctor hatched up a new idea.

"If I should have you take several treatments of walking seated," he said, "I would hasten greatly the effect of the water. It's a chance to experiment."

"A happy thought," said Andermatt, who then added: "Now, Père Clovis, off you go, and do not forget our agreement."

The old rascal went off, always groaning. Then, as evening was drawing near, all the Mont-Oriol directors went in to dinner, for the theatrical entertainment was scheduled to take place at half-past seven.

It was held in the large hall of the new casino, which could seat a thousand people.

From seven o'clock on the members of the audience who had not reserved seats began to arrive.

At half-past seven the hall was filled, and the curtain rose on a farce of two acts. This preceded Saint-Landri's operetta, and was performed by vocalists from Vichy who were borrowed for this occasion.

Christiane, who sat on the front row between her husband and her brother, suffered greatly with the heat.

She said every few moments:

"I can't stand it any longer. I can't stand it any longer!"

After the farce, when the operetta was commencing, she feared she would be ill, and turning to her husband she said:

"Dear Will, I must go out. I am suffocating!"

The banker was vexed. He wanted, above all, that the fête should be a success from beginning to end, without anything to mar it. He replied:

"Make every effort, I beg you, to throw it off; your leaving would upset everything. You would have to pass through the whole hall."

But Gontran, who was seated behind her, with Paul, overheard this.

"You are too warm?" he said.

"Yes, I am suffocating."

"All right. Wait. You will have something to laugh at."

A window stood near. He slid along, stepped up on a chair and sprang out, scarcely attracting any attention.

Then he went into the café, which was quite empty, and stretched his hand under the bar where he had seen Petrus Martel hide the signal rocket, and stole it. Then he ran and concealed himself in a clump of trees, and lighted it.

The swift yellow sheath flew upward towards the clouds in a curve, and threw across the sky a long shower of drops of flame.

Almost immediately a loud explosion broke out on the opposite mountain and a cluster of stars was scattered out into the darkness of night.

Someone shouted in the auditorium, where the chords of Saint-Landri were quivering: "They are setting off the fireworks!"

The spectators who were nearest to the doors rose quickly to make sure and stole out softly. All the rest turned to look out the windows, but they could see nothing, for they were looking towards Limagne.

People asked: "Is it true? Is it true?"

The impatient crowd grew excited, eager to see the fireworks.

A voice outside shouted: "It's true, they are setting them off."

Then in a second the whole audience rose. They rushed to the doors, they jostled one another, they shouted to those who obstructed the exit: "Hurry up, hurry up!"

Soon everyone was out in the park. Saint-Landri, alone, filled with rage, kept beating time in front of his distracted orchestra, while over on the other hill brilliant lights succeeded Roman candles, with intermingled explosions.

Suddenly a tremendous voice shouted three times in succession: "Stop, *nom de Dieu!* Stop, *nom de Dieu!* Stop, *nom de Dieu!*"

And as an immense Bengal light was just then set off on the mountain, and illumined with a red glow the great boulders and trees to the right, and with a blue sheen those to the left, Petrus Martel was seen standing on one of the imitation marble vases that ornamented the casino terrace, frantic, bare-headed, his arms raised in the air, gesticulating and yelling.

The brilliant illumination died out—one saw only the real stars. But directly another piece was set off, and Petrus Martel, leaping to the ground, cried: "What a disaster! what a disaster! *Mon Dieu,* what a disaster!"

And he rushed through the crowd with tragic gestures, shaking his fists in the air, stamping with rage, and crying out: "What a disaster! *Mon Dieu,* what a disaster!"

Christiane had taken Paul's arm to take a seat in the open air, and she watched with delight the rockets flying up to the sky.

Her brother suddenly joined them and said: "Well, did it succeed? Do you think it is funny?"

She murmured:

"What, was it you?"

"Why, yes, it was I. Was it a good joke?"

She began to laugh, thinking it, indeed, very amusing. But Andermatt came up, heart-broken. He could not understand how such a mistake had happened. Someone had stolen the rocket from under the bar and given the signal. Such an infamous action could have been perpetrated only by an emissary of the old company, by an agent of Dr. Bonnefille's.

"It's distressing, perfectly distressing. Here is a complete loss of fireworks worth two thousand three hundred francs!"

Gontran answered:

"No, my dear fellow, to be exact, the loss is not more than a quarter, or a third, if you like—call it seven hundred and sixty-six francs. Your guests will still enjoy fifteen hundred and thirty-four francs' worth of rockets. Really, that's not bad."

The banker's anger was turned upon his brother-in-law. He took his arm roughly.

"As far as you are concerned, I must speak seriously to you. Now that I've got you, we will take a stroll down the park paths. Besides, I've got five minutes."

Then, turning to Christiane, he said:

"My dear, I will leave you in the care of our friend, Brétigny. But take care of yourself. Don't stay out of doors long. You might catch cold, you know. Be careful, be careful!"

She murmured:

"Don't be anxious, dear."

And Andermatt led Gontran away.

As soon as they were alone, at a little distance from the crowd, the banker stopped.

"My dear fellow, I want to speak to you about your financial position."

"About my financial position?"

"Yes, you know all about it, your financial position."

"No, but you ought to know about it for me, because you lend me money."

"Indeed, yes, I do know about it very well, and that's why I am talking to you about it."

"It seems to me at least that the time is not well chosen—in the midst of fireworks!"

"On the contrary, the time is well chosen. I am not talking to you in the midst of the fireworks, but just before the ball——"

"Before the ball? I don't understand."

"Well, you will understand. This is your position. You have nothing but debts, and you never will have anything but debts——"

Gontran answered with a serious air:

"You tell me that rather harshly."

"Yes, because I have to. Listen to me. You have squandered your share of your mother's fortune. We need say no more about that."

"We need say no more."

"As regards your father, he has an income of thirty thousand francs, call it a capital of about eight hundred thousand francs. Your share would then ultimately be four hundred thousand francs. But you owe me alone a hundred and ninety thousand francs. And, besides, you owe money to usurers."

Gontran muttered haughtily:

"Why don't you say to Jews?"

"Very well, to Jews, although there is among the number a churchwarden of Saint-Sulpice who served as intermediary for a priest in the transaction—but I won't quibble about such trifles. The fact is, you owe various usurers, Jews or Catholics, about the same amount. Let us call it one hundred and fifty thousand, at the lowest figure. That makes a total of three hundred and forty thousand francs, on which you pay interest by making new loans, except mine, which you do not repay."

"That's correct," said Gontran.

"Then you have nothing left at all."

"Nothing at all—except my brother-in-law."

"Except your brother-in-law, who is tired of lending you money."

"And so?"

"And so, my dear boy, the poorest peasant, living in one of these huts, is richer than you."

"Perfectly true—and further?"

"Further—further—if your father should die to-morrow, there would be no other way for you to get bread, to get bread, you understand, than to accept a position as clerk in my business house. And that would still be only a way of disguising the pension that

I would give you."

Gontran said, in an irritated tone:

"My dear William, these matters annoy me. I know them as well as you, and I repeat that the time is ill-chosen to remind me of them with—with—with so little diplomacy."

"Excuse me, allow me to finish. You can only get yourself out of this by a marriage. But you are a poor match in spite of your name that sounds well, without being illustrious. At least it is not one of those for which an heiress, even a Jewish heiress, will pay a fortune. So you must find a woman who is acceptable and rich, which is not so easy."

Gontran interrupted: "Name her at once, that would be better."

"Very well, one of the daughters of Père Oriol, whichever you choose. And that is why I am talking to you about this before the ball."

"And now explain to me more at length," said Gontran coldly.

"It's very easy. You see the success that I have had at the first stroke with this resort. Now, if I had in my hands, or rather if we had in ours, all the land held by this sly fox of a peasant, I would make money out of it. To mention only the vineyards that lie between the establishment and the hotel and between the hotel and the casino, I would give a million francs for them to-morrow, I, Andermatt. Now, these vineyards and the other lands all around the knoll will be the girls' dowries. The father told me again recently, perhaps not without intention. Well—if you were willing, we could make a mint of money there together."

Gontran muttered, seeming to consider:

"It's possible. I'll think of it."

"Think of it, my dear boy, and do not forget that I never advise anything except what is very safe, after I have thought a great deal about it, and when I know all the possible results, and all the certain advantages."

But Gontran raised his arm, and exclaimed, as if he had suddenly forgotten all that his brother-in-law had told him:

"Look! How beautiful it is!"

A set piece flamed up in the form of a burning palace from which a blazing flag floated, bearing "Mont-Oriol" in letters of fire, and opposite, above the plain, the moon, red also, seemed to have risen so as to look down at this spectacle. Then, when the palace had burned for several minutes, it exploded like a ship blowing up, scattering into the sky fantastic stars, which in their turn burst, and the moon remained alone, calm and round on the horizon.

The crowd applauded wildly, shouting: "Hurrah! Bravo! Bravo!"

Suddenly Andermatt said:

"We must go and open the ball, my dear fellow. Will you dance the first quadrille vis-à-vis to me?"

"Yes, with pleasure, my dear brother-in-law."

"Whom are you going to ask to dance with you? I am engaged to dance with the Duchess of Ramas."

Gontran answered carelessly:

"I shall ask Charlotte Oriol."

They went again up the knoll. When they passed by the place where Christiane had stayed with Paul Brétigny, they did not see them any longer.

William said:

"She listened to my advice, she has

gone to lie down. She was very tired to-day."

And he walked on towards the ball-room that the servants had arranged during the fireworks. But Christiane had not gone to her room at all, as her husband thought.

The moment that she felt that she was alone with Paul, she pressed his hand and said in a low voice:

"At last you have come. I have waited for you for a month. Every morning I wondered: 'Shall I see him to-day?' And every evening I said to myself: 'Will it be to-morrow?' Why have you delayed so long, my love?"

He answered with embarrassment:

"I had business matters to attend to."

She leaned against him, murmuring:

"It wasn't kind to leave me here alone with them, especially as I am not well."

He moved his chair a little way.

"Be careful, people might see us. These rockets light up the whole place."

She had not given it a thought. She said:

"I love you so much! Listen, I want —you understand—I want to go with you at once to the place where we said good-bye, last year! You remember it well, don't you, on the road to Roche-Pradière?"

"Christiane — listen — it's absurd, Christiane!"

She did not reply and walked towards the slope that led to the vineyards. He knew that calm determination that nothing could divert, the quiet obstinacy of those blue eyes, of that little forehead of the fair woman that no obstacle could daunt; and he took her arm to support her on the way.

"What if people should see us, Christiane?"

"You did not say that last year. And, besides, everyone is at the fête. We will be back before our absence has been noticed."

They had soon to climb up the stony footpath. She panted, and leaned her whole weight on him.

He stopped and wanted to take her back. But she would not listen.

"No, no, I am happy. You do not understand."

She did not realize that this man was one of the race of lovers, and not of the race of fathers. For some time he had kept away from her, and was disgusted with her in spite of himself.

They had reached the road.

"It was there that you waited for me that evening," she said.

And she raised her lips. He kissed them without speaking, with a cold kiss.

She murmured for the second time:

"Do you remember how you kissed my shadow on the ground? We were standing just like this, see?"

And in the hope that he would do it over again, she ran away a little distance from him. He said to her with a touch of impatience in his voice:

"See here, Christiane, this child's play is ridiculous."

She came back to him, hurt, sad, with outstretched arms, and threw herself on his breast, crying:

"Oh, you love me less. I feel it! I am sure of it!"

He had pity on her, and took her head in his hands and pressed two long kisses on her eyes.

Then they went back in silence. He

could think of nothing to say to her, and as she leaned against him, overcome with fatigue, he hastened his steps that he might not feel her brushing against him.

When they approached the hotel, they separated, and she went up to her room.

The casino orchestra was playing dance music, and Paul went to see the ball. A waltz was being danced, and everyone was on the floor. It was a waltz, and everyone was dancing. Dr. Latonne was waltzing with Madame Paille, the younger, Andermatt with Louise Oriol, the handsome Dr. Mazelli with the Duchess of Ramas, and Gontran with Charlotte Oriol. He was whispering in her ear in that tender way that shows a courtship is commenced; and she, smiling and blushing behind her fan, seemed highly delighted.

Paul heard a voice behind him say:

"Look, look, M. de Ravenel is whispering pretty nothings to my patient."

It was Dr. Honorat, who was standing by the door and amusing himself by watching them. He continued:

"Yes, yes, that has been going on now for half an hour. Everyone has noticed it. It doesn't look as if it displeased the little girl."

He added after a pause:

"And she is a pearl, that young girl, good, gay, simple-hearted, devoted, true, a fine nature, you know. She is worth ten of the older sister. You know, I have known them from childhood—these young girls—and yet their father prefers the elder because she is more —more—like him—more of a peasant —less generous—more economical—sharper—and more jealous. Oh! she is a good girl all the same—I did not want to say anything against her—but in spite of myself I compare them, you understand—and after comparing them —I judge them—that is all."

The waltz ended. Gontran rejoined his friend, and when he saw the doctor, he said:

"Why, doctor, the medical staff of Enval seems to have increased wonderfully. We have a M. Mazelli who dances to perfection, and a little old M. Black who seems to stand in well with Heaven."

But Dr. Honorat was very discreet. He did not enjoy gossiping about his colleagues.

CHAPTER II

PLANNING A MARRIAGE

The subject of the doctors had now become the burning question at Enval. They had suddenly taken the place by storm, engrossed all the attention, and all the interest of the people. In past times, the springs flowed under the sole authority of Dr. Bonnefille, amidst the harmless animosities of restless Dr. Latonne and placid Dr. Honorat.

It was a very different matter now.

The moment that the success planned by Andermatt during the winter had

been realized, thanks to the able co-operation of Professors Cloche, Mas-Roussel, and Remusot, who had each brought a following of at least two to three hundred invalids, Dr. Latonne, superintendent of the new establishment, had become an important personage. He was especially patronized by Professor Mas-Roussel, whose student he had been, and whose bearing and gestures he imitated.

Dr. Bonnefille was hardly even mentioned. He railed furiously against Mont-Oriol, and stayed all day long in the old establishment, with a few old patients who had remained true to him.

For some invalids really believed that he alone knew the true properties of the springs, that he held, so to speak, their secret, because he had officially administered them since the founding of the resort.

Dr. Honorat retained only a small practice among the natives of Auvergne. He was contented with this modest income and lived on good terms with everyone, consoling himself by saying he preferred cards and white wine to medicine.

But he did not go to the extreme of loving his fellow physicians.

Dr. Latonne would thus have continued to be the great seer of Mont-Oriol, if one morning there had not appeared a very short man, almost a dwarf, whose great head sunk between his shoulders, big round eyes, and huge hands, all together made a strange-looking being. This new doctor, M. Black, had been brought to the place by Professor Remusot, and had at once drawn attention to himself by his excessive piety.

Almost every morning, between two calls, he went for a few minutes to church, and nearly every Sunday he received communion. The curé soon got some patients for him, some old maids, some charity patients, some pious ladies who first asked the advice of their pastor, before calling in a man of science of whose sentiments, reserve and professional modesty they wished, above all, to be assured.

Then one day the arrival of the Princess Maldebourg was heralded. She was of the old German nobility, a fervent Catholic, who the very evening of her arrival called Dr. Black, on the recommendation of a cardinal of the Church of Rome.

From that moment, he became the fashion. It was good taste, good form, and very stylish to be under his care. He was the only doctor of real refinement, so they said, the only one in whom a woman could have implicit confidence.

So he was to be seen, rushing from one hotel to another, from morning till evening—this little man with a bull-dog head, who always spoke in a low voice, constantly, in every place, and with everyone. He seemed always to have important secrets to confide or to receive, for one met him often in the halls in most mysterious conference with the hotel guests, the maids of his patients, and with anyone who approached his patients.

When he was on the street, as soon as he saw a lady of his acquaintance, he went straight to her with his short, quick step, and began at once to mumble new and minute directions, like a priest at confession.

The old women especially worshipped

him. He listened to their stories to the end without interrupting them, and made notes on what they said, and of all their questions, and their wishes.

He increased or diminished, every day, the amount of water his patients were to drink, which inspired them with great confidence in his care of them.

"We stopped yesterday at three glasses and three-quarters," he would say, "very well! To-day we will take only two glasses and a half, and to-morrow three glasses. Do not forget —to-morrow, three glasses—I am very particular about it, very!"

And these patients were convinced that he was, indeed, very particular about it. That he might not forget all these figures and fractions, he wrote them in a note-book, so that he would never make a mistake. For a patient will not forgive an error of half a glass.

He ordered and modified with the same exactness the length of the daily baths in virtue of principles known to himself alone. Dr. Latonne, jealous and exasperated, shrugged his shoulders, and said: "He is a fraud." His hatred of Dr. Black even led him at times to deprecate the mineral waters: "Since we hardly know their action, it is clearly impossible to prescribe every day changes in the dose, which can be governed by no therapeutic law. Such proceedings as these do the very greatest injury to the practice of medicine."

Dr. Honorat contented himself with smiling. He always took pains to forget the number of glasses that he had ordered, five minutes after a consultation.

"The difference of two, more or less," he said to Gontran in moments of merriment, "will affect only the spring, and that won't trouble it any!" The only malicious joke that he allowed himself to make on his pious colleague, was to call him, "the Doctor of the Sacred Sitz-Bath." His jealousy was cautious, mocking and calm.

He sometimes added: "Oh! that fellow, he understands his patient thoroughly—and that is worth more to us than to understand his disease!"

But, lo and behold! one morning, a noble Spanish family, the Duke and Duchess of Ramas-Aldaverra, arrived, and brought with them their physician, who was an Italian, Dr. Mazelli, of Milan.

He was a young man of thirty, tall, slender, and a very handsome fellow, who wore a mustache.

From the very first evening, he made a conquest of the *table d'hôte;* for the duke, a melancholy man, monstrously fat, had a horror of isolation and wished to take his meals in the dining-room. Dr. Mazelli almost at once knew all the names of the hotel habitués, and he had a pleasant word for every man, a compliment for every lady, and even a smile for every one of the servants.

He was seated at the right of the duchess, a handsome woman between thirty-five and forty years of age, with a pale complexion, black eyes, and dark hair, and he said to her, as every dish was passed: "Very little," or, perhaps, "No, not that," or sometimes, "Yes, eat some of that." And he filled her glass with his own hand, with the greatest care, measuring very exactly the proportions of wine and water that he mingled.

He also regulated the duke's food, but with obvious carelessness. Besides,

the patient paid no heed to his advice, but devoured everything like a voracious animal. He drank at every meal two decanters of pure wine, then dropped down into a chair out in the air, in front of the hotel, whining with pain, and lamenting over his digestion. After the first dinner, Dr. Mazelli, who had judged and weighed everyone there with a glance of his eye, went on the terrace of the casino, to join Gontran, who was smoking a cigar, and introduced himself and began to chat.

At the close of an hour they were good friends. Next day he got an introduction to Christiane, as she was going to her bath, and gained her interest in ten minutes' conversation. The same day, he placed them on a friendly footing with the duchess, who had no fondness for solitude, either.

He looked out for everything in the Spaniards' home. He gave excellent advice to the chef in regard to the cooking, to the lady's maid valuable suggestions on the hygiene of the head, to preserve the brilliant lustre of her mistress' hair, its superb shade and abundance. To the coachman, he gave useful information on veterinary medicine. Above all, he knew how to make the hours pass quickly and lightly, to hunt up amusements, and to select desirable acquaintances among the hotel guests.

The duchess said to Christiane, in speaking of him:

"He is a wonderful man, dear madame, and he knows everything, he does everything. It is to him that I owe my figure."

"What, your figure?"

"Yes, I was beginning to grow fat, and he saved me with his diet and liqueurs."

He knew, besides, how to make even medicine interesting, he spoke of it with such ease, such gaiety, and with a slight skepticism that served to convince his listeners of his superiority.

"It's very simple," he said, "I do not believe in remedies. Or, rather, I scarcely believe in them. The old school of medicine started with the assumption that there was a remedy for everything. They thought that God, in His divine benevolence, had created drugs for all diseases, only He had left to men—out of malice, perhaps—the trouble of discovering these drugs. Now, men have succeeded in discovering a vast number without even knowing for what disease each one is adapted. Really there are no remedies; there are only diseases. When a disease declares itself, we must interrupt its course, according to some, hasten it according to others, by some means or other. Each school praises its own method. In the very same case, one will find the most strongly contrasted methods, and the most opposed remedies employed. Ice will be used by one and extreme heat by another, fasting will be recommended by this one and forced nourishment by that one. I am omitting the innumerable poisonous products that chemistry obtains for us from plants and minerals. All these have an effect, it is true, but no one knows what. Sometimes they cure, sometimes they kill."

And with a great deal of vivacity, he pointed out the impossibility of certainty, and the lack of any scientific basis until organic chemistry and biological chemistry should become the basis of a new school of medicine. He narrated anecdotes about the monstrous

errors of the greatest physicians, proving the insanity and falsity of their pretended science.

"Make the body carry on its functions," he said, "make the skin, the muscles, all the organs, and especially the stomach, which is the foster-father of the whole machine, its regulator and storehouse of life, carry on their functions."

He affirmed that at will, simply by dieting, he could make people gay or sad, capable of physical or intellectual labor, according to the food that he ordered. That by this method he could even act on the cerebral faculties, on the memory, on the imagination, on all the manifestations of the mind. And he concluded jokingly, in these words:

"As for me, I cure by massage and curaçoa."

He attributed wonders to massage, and spoke of the Hollander, Hamstrang, as if he were a god, who accomplished miracles. Then, showing his fine, white hands, he would say:

"With these one might resuscitate the dead."

And the duchess added:

"The fact is, he massages to perfection."

He also praised alcoholic liquors, taken in small quantities to stimulate the stomach at certain times, and he made mixed drinks, scientifically compounded, that the duchess had to drink at certain hours, either before or after her meals.

He could be seen every day going to the *Café du Casino,* about half-past nine, when he asked for his bottles. They were brought to him fastened with little locks of silver of which he had the key. He poured out a little of one, then a little of another, slowly, into a very pretty blue glass that a very conventional footman held with due respect.

Then the doctor ordered:

"There! Take that to the duchess at her bath to drink before she dresses on coming out of the water."

And when they asked him out of curiosity: "What have you got in there?" he answered, "Nothing but fine anisette, very pure curaçoa, and excellent bitters."

This handsome physician in a few days became the center of admiration of all the invalids. And all sorts of schemes were employed to get from him some advice.

When he was going along the paths of the park, at the time when people were promenading, one heard nothing but the exclamation, "Doctor!" from all the chairs where beautiful women were sitting, young women, who were resting a little between two glasses from the Christiane Spring. Then when he paused with a smile on his lips, they drew him away for a few moments along the little path bordering the stream.

They talked to him first of this and that, then discreetly, adroitly, coquettishly, they reached the question of health—but carelessly, as if it were an indifferent matter.

For this doctor was not at all at the disposal of the public. They did not pay him and they could not call him in, for he belonged to the duchess, and to no one but the duchess. This very fact excited people's efforts and roused their desire to consult him. And when it was whispered, very low, that the duchess was jealous, very jealous,

there was a desperate strife among all these ladies to obtain advice from the handsome Italian doctor.

He was the talk of the day, the great subject of conversation, the sole object of public interest, when the news spread that the count, Gontran de Ravenel, was courting Charlotte Oriol with the intention of marrying her. This became at once a source of deafening gossip in Enval.

Since the evening when he had opened the inaugural ball of the casino with her, Gontran had been constantly with her. In public he showed towards her all the little attentions that men use to please, without any attempt at concealment. And their relations in general assumed a gay and natural courtesy that bid fair to lead them to love.

They saw one another almost every day, for the girls had formed a strong friendship for Christiane, in which, no doubt, was mingled a touch of flattered vanity. Gontran, all at once, no longer left his sister, and he planned pleasure parties for the mornings and games for the evenings, which greatly surprised Christiane and Paul. Then they saw that he gave all his attention to Charlotte, gaily teased her, complimented her without seeming to, showed her those thousand trifling attentions that link two persons in the bonds of love. The young girl, who was now accustomed to the free-and-easy manners of this lively fellow, used to Parisian society, at first thought nothing of it, and following her confiding, straightforward nature, she laughed and played with him as she would have with a brother.

But when she had gone home with her older sister after a party at the hotel, where Gontran several times had tried to kiss her as forfeits in a game of "fly-pigeon," Louise, who had seemed anxious and nervous for some time, said to her abruptly:

"You would do well to be more careful in your bearing. M. Gontran does not behave properly to you."

"Not properly? Why, what has he said?"

"You know very well, don't act the simpleton. At this rate you would soon be compromised. And if you can't look after your own conduct, it's my duty to attend to it."

Charlotte, confused and ashamed, faltered:

"But I don't know—I assure you—I have seen nothing——"

Her sister answered severely:

"Listen, this must not continue. If he wishes to marry you, papa must consider it and give him an answer; but if he is just flirting, he must stop at once."

Then, suddenly, Charlotte grew angry, without knowing why or wherefore. She was annoyed now that her sister should take it upon herself to direct and reprimand her, and she told her with her voice trembling and her eyes filled with tears that she should not have interfered with what did not concern her. She stammered, exasperated, warned by a vague but sure instinct that jealousy had been awakened in the bitter heart of Louise.

They parted without any embrace, and Charlotte wept in her bed as she thought of things that she had never foreseen.

Gradually her tears ceased and she began to reflect.

Yes, it was true that Gontran's man-

ner had changed. She had been conscious of this without understanding it. Now she understood it. He paid her on all occasions pretty, delicate compliments. Once he had kissed her hand. What did he wish? She pleased him, but to what point? Might it by chance be possible that he would marry her? And at once she seemed to hear, somewhere in the air, in the empty darkness of space where her dreams were beginning to flit away, a voice calling: "Comtesse de Ravenel!"

Her excitement was so strong that she sat up in bed. Then, in her bare feet, she hunted for her slippers under the chair on which she had thrown her dress, and she went to open the window without realizing what she was doing, to give room to her hopes.

She heard them talking in the lower hall, and Colosse's raised voice saying: "Let it alone. Let it alone. There will be time to see. Father will arrange it. There is no harm in it yet. It's father's business to attend to it."

She saw the light streaming in a bright square from the window below her. She wondered: "Who is there? What are they talking about?" A shadow passed. It was her sister! Then she had not gone to bed. Why? But the light was extinguished, and Charlotte began to muse again over the things that were agitating her heart.

She could not sleep now. Did he love her? Oh, no! Not yet! But he might love her because she pleased him! And if he grew to love her very much, desperately, as people do in society, he would no doubt marry her.

Born in a home of vine-dressers, although she had been educated in the convent attended by the fashionable young ladies of Clermont, she had still retained the modesty and humility of the peasant. She thought that she might marry a notary, perhaps, or a lawyer, or a doctor. But the idea of becoming a real society lady with a title to her name had never entered her mind. Now, this unexpected, almost impossible thing, suddenly conjured up by some words of her sister, seemed to be approaching her, like a ship's sail before the wind.

She murmured between her lips with every breath that she drew: "Comtesse de Ravenel." She saw beautiful parlors lighted up, lovely, smiling ladies, handsome carriages waiting before the steps of a château and tall servants in livery bowing as she passed.

She was too warm—her heart beat fast. She rose a second time to drink a glass of water, and stood for some moments barefooted on the cold floor of her room.

Then a little calmed, she finally fell asleep. But she woke before the dawn, her veins still pulsing with excitement.

She was ashamed of her little room, with its white walls that had been whitewashed by the glazier of the place, of her poor cotton curtains, and of the two straw-bottomed chairs that never left their places at the two corners of the bureau.

She felt that she was a peasant, in the midst of this rustic furniture that told her origin. She felt humble, unworthy of this handsome, mocking fellow whose fair, laughing face floated before her eyes, faded away, then returned, gradually took possession of her, and already had a place in her heart.

Then she jumped out of bed and ran to get her mirror, her little hand mirror, as large as the bottom of a plate,

then she lay down again with her mirror in her hands and she looked at her face in the midst of her loosely hanging hair, against the white background of the pillow.

Sometimes she laid down on the coverings the little glass that showed her her image, and she thought how impossible this marriage would be, the distance between them was so great. Then a throb of disappointment almost choked her. Then again she looked in the mirror and smiled and, as she thought that she was pretty, the difficulties disappeared.

When she went down to breakfast, her sister, who seemed irritable, asked her:

"What are you planning to do to-day?"

Charlotte answered without hesitation:

"Aren't we going to drive to Royat with Madame Andermatt?"

Louise replied:

"You will go alone then, but you would do better, after what I told you last night——"

The younger interrupted her:

"I am not asking your advice. Attend to your own affairs."

And they said nothing more.

Père Oriol and Jacques came in and sat down at the table. The old man asked almost immediately:

"What are you going to do to-day, girls?"

Charlotte did not give her sister a chance to answer, and said:

"Oh! I am going to Royat with Madame Andermatt."

The two men looked at her with a very satisfied air, and the father muttered with the engaging smile that he had in treating advantageous business affairs:

"That's good, that's good."

She was more surprised at this secret satisfaction betrayed by their whole manner, than by the open anger of Louise, and she wondered, a little troubled: "Have they been talking it all over together?"

After the meal was finished, she went back to her room, put on her hat, took her parasol, threw a light wrap over her shoulders and walked towards the hotel; for they were to leave at half-past nine. Christiane was surprised that Louise had not come.

Charlotte felt she was blushing a little as she answered:

"She is quite tired; I think she has a headache."

They got into the big six-seated landau that they still always used. The marquis and his daughter sat in the back, and the little Oriol girl then found that her seat was between the young men, riding backwards.

They passed by Tournoël; then followed a beautiful winding road, shaded with walnut and chestnut trees, that wound round the foot of the mountain. Charlotte several times felt that Gontran pressed too closely against her, but not so much that she could feel offended at it. As he was seated at her right, he spoke very near to her cheek, and she did not dare to turn to answer him, fearing his breath that she already felt on her lips, and fearing, too, to look into his eyes, lest she should be embarrassed by their expression.

He whispered to her flattering nonsense, amusing little jokes, and pleasant and agreeable compliments.

Christiane scarcely spoke at all; for

she felt tired and ill. And Paul seemed sad and preoccupied. The marquis alone was free from worry or trouble, and talked along in the gay and graceful manner of an egotistical old nobleman.

They got out at the park at Royat to listen to the band, and Gontran took Charlotte's arm, and started off with her ahead. The army of bathers, on the seats around the kiosk where the orchestra leader was beating time for the brass instruments and the violins, watched the strollers pass by.

Charlotte and Gontran wandered about among the people who were seated, looking for ludicrous spectacles over which to make merry.

Every moment they heard some one say behind them: "Look! that's a pretty girl." Gontran was flattered, and wondered if they thought she was his sister, his wife or his sweetheart.

Christiane sat between her father and Paul, and watching them pass by several times, thought that their youth and gaiety was running away with them, and called them to her to quiet them. But they did not pay the least attention, and kept on wandering among the crowd and enjoyed themselves with their whole hearts.

She said in a low voice to Paul Brétigny:

"He will end by compromising her. We must talk to him this evening when we go back."

Paul answered:

"I have thought about that already. You are quite right."

They went to dinner at one of the restaurants of Clermont-Ferrand, as those of Royat, in the judgment of the marquis, who was quite a gourmand, were very indifferent. They reached home at nightfall.

Charlotte had grown serious. Gontran had squeezed her hand when he handed her her gloves, as she was leaving the table. Her young girl's conscience was suddenly troubled. That was an avowal! a bold step! an impropriety! What ought she to do? Speak to him? But what could she say? To get angry would be absurd! So much tact was needed in these matters! But if she did nothing and said nothing, she would appear to accept his advances, to be an accomplice, to give an answering "yes" to this pressure of his hand.

And she weighed the situation, and blamed herself for having been too gay and familiar at Royat; and now she thought that her sister had been right, and that she was compromised, lost! The carriage rolled along the road, Paul and Gontran smoked in silence, the marquis nodded, Christiane looked at the stars, and Charlotte could scarcely restrain her tears, for she had taken three glasses of champagne.

When they had returned home, Christiane said to her father:

"As it is dark, will you take the young lady home?"

The marquis at once offered his arm and started off with her.

Paul took Gontran by the shoulders and whispered in his ear:

"Come and talk for five minutes with your sister and me."

And they went up to the little sitting-room that was connected with the Andermatts' apartments.

As soon as they were seated, Christiane said:

"Listen, M. Paul and I are going to give you a moral lecture."

"A lecture! But what about? I am

as well-behaved as a statue—for want of opportunity."

"Don't make fun. You are doing something very unwise and dangerous, without even thinking. You are compromising this young girl."

He appeared to be greatly astonished.

"Whom do you mean? Charlotte?"

"Yes, Charlotte."

"I compromise Charlotte? I?"

"Yes, you are compromising her. Everyone is talking about it here, and then besides you were very—very—frivolous in the park at Royat. Isn't this so, Brétigny?"

Paul replied:

"Yes, madame, I agree entirely with what you say."

Gontran turned his chair, sat astride it, lighted a fresh cigar, and began to laugh.

"So then I am compromising Charlotte Oriol?"

He waited several seconds to watch the effect of his answer, and then added:

"Well, how do you know that I am not going to marry her?"

Christiane gave a start of surprise.

"Marry her? You? Why, you are crazy!"

"Why so?"

"That—that little—peasant girl——"

"Trala-la—prejudice. Do you learn it from your husband?"

As she did not make any reply to this direct argument, he went on, framing questions and answers himself.

"Is she pretty? Yes! Is she well-educated? Yes! And more artless, refined, simple, and frank than society girls. She knows as much as any of them, for she speaks English and the language of Auvergne, which makes two foreign languages. She will be as rich as any heiress of the faubourg that was called Saint-Germain, but is now to be rechristened Faubourg Saint-Dêche. Finally, if she is a peasant's daughter, she will only be the more healthy, and will give me fine children. So there."

As he always seemed to be laughing and joking, Christiane asked him hesitatingly:

"Tell me, are you talking seriously?"

"Parbleu! Why not? She is charming—that little girl. She has a good heart and a pretty face, a gay nature, a good disposition, rosy cheeks, bright eyes, white teeth, long hair, thick and glossy. And her vine-dresser of a father will be as rich as Crœsus, thanks to your husband, my dear sister. What more do you want? A peasant's daughter! Well, isn't a peasant's daughter worth all the daughters of dishonorable business men who pay so dearly for dukes with doubtful titles, and all the daughters of a corrupt nobility that the Empire gave us, and all the women of doubtful origin that one meets in society? Why, if I should marry that young girl, I should be doing the first good and sensible action of my life!"

Christiane reflected, then, suddenly convinced, overcome and delighted, she said:

"After all, what he says is true. It's altogether right and just! Then you will marry her, my dear Gontran?"

It was then he who calmed her down.

"Not so fast—not so fast—let me think in my turn. I say only: *If* I should marry her, I should be doing the first good and sensible action of my life. That doesn't say yet that I *will marry* her. But I am thinking about it, I am studying her, I am courting her a little to see if she really pleases me wholly.

Finally, I will not give you either yes or no as an answer, but it is nearer yes than no."

Christiane turning to Paul said:

"What do you think of it, Monsieur Brétigny?"

Sometimes she called him Monsieur Brétigny and sometimes just Brétigny.

Always fascinated by things in which he saw a touch of magnanimity, by marriages beneath one's position that seemed generous, and by all the show of sentiment behind which the human heart conceals itself, he replied:

"For my part, I think he is right. If he likes her, let him marry her. He could not find anyone better."

But the marquis and Andermatt now came in, and the conversation turned into another channel. The two young men went to the casino to see if the billiard-hall was still open.

From that day on, Christiane and Paul seemed to favor the open courtship that Gontran carried on with Charlotte.

They invited the young girl more often, and kept her to dinner, and they ended by treating her as if she were already one of the family.

She saw through all this, understood it, and was wild with delight over it! Her little heart beat like a drum, and she built fantastic castles in Spain. Still, Gontran had said nothing to her, but his manner, his words, his tone of voice, his air of more serious courtesy, and his caressing look, seemed to say to her every day: "I have chosen you; you shall be my wife."

And the air of gentle friendship, of modest surrender, of chaste reserve that she now showed towards him, seemed to answer: "I know it, and I will say 'yes' when you ask for my hand."

In the young girl's family this was talked over in whispers. Louise scarcely spoke to her, except to vex her with allusions that would wound her, and to utter sharp, cutting words. Père Oriol and Jacques seemed well satisfied.

Yet she had never really asked herself if she loved this handsome suitor whose wife she would no doubt become. She liked him, she thought constantly about him, she considered him handsome, brilliant, elegant, and she thought above all about what she would do when he had married her.

At Enval, everyone had forgotten all about the deadly rivalries of the doctors and the owners of the springs, guesses as to whether the Duchess of Ramas was in love with her doctor, all the gossip that flows with the water of the hot-springs resorts, and the all-absorbing subject was: Count Gontran of Ravenel was going to marry the Oriol girl.

Then Gontran thought that the moment had come, and one morning, taking Andermatt by the arm, as they were leaving the table, he said:

"My dear fellow, strike the iron while it is hot! This is the exact state of affairs. The little girl is waiting for my proposal, without my having committed myself as yet, but she will not reject it, you may be sure. We must sound the father in such a way that we may secure both your interests and mine at the same time."

Andermatt replied:

"Don't worry. I will take care of the matter. I shall sound him this very day, without either committing you or advancing your suit. Then when the situation is clearly understood, I will be

ready to talk."

"Quite right."

Then after a pause of several seconds, Gontran continued:

"Hold on. It is perhaps my last day of bachelorhood. I am going to Royat, where I saw some acquaintances the other day. I'll be back at night, and I will tap at your door to find out about it."

He had his horse saddled, and went along by the mountain, breathing in the pure light air, and galloping at moments so as to feel the swift caress of the air touching the fresh skin of his cheeks and tickling his mustache.

The evening at Royat was a merry one. Gontran met some friends who had girls with them. They were a long time at supper, and he came back very late. Everyone was asleep in the Mont-Oriol hotel when Gontran tapped at Andermatt's door.

At first no one answered. Then, as the knocking grew loud, a hoarse voice, a sleepy voice, grumbled from within:

"Who is there?"

"It's I, Gontran."

"Wait, I will open the door."

Andermatt appeared in his nightshirt. His face was puffed up, his beard bristling, his head tied up in a silk handkerchief. Then he went back to his bed, sat up, and stretching his hands over the covering said:

"Well, my dear boy, it won't work. This is the situation. I've sounded that old fox, Oriol, without mentioning you, saying only that one of my friends—perhaps I let him think that it concerned Paul Brétigny—might be a good match for one of his daughters, and I asked what dowry he would give them. He asked me in his turn what the young man's fortune amounted to, and I placed it at three hundred thousand francs, with expectations."

"But I have nothing," murmured Gontran.

"I will lend them to you, my dear boy. If we put this thing through together, your lands will yield me enough to reimburse me."

Gontran sneered. "Oh, yes! I'll have the girl, and you will have the money."

But Andermatt was all out of patience with this.

"If I am to take care of you just so that you may insult me, there's an end of it. We will stop right here——"

Gontran apologized:

"Don't be angry, my dear friend, and forgive me. I know that you are a very honest man, and above reproach in matters of business. I would not ask you for a pourboire if I were your coachman, but I would trust my fortune to you if I were a millionaire——"

William, appeased, resumed:

"We will return to that later. Let us finish at present the main question. The old man was not fooled by my ruse, and answered: 'It depends on which one of the girls is concerned. If it regards Louise, the elder, this will be her dowry.' And he enumerated to me all the lands surrounding the establishment, those connecting the baths with the hotel and the hotel with the casino, in short, all those that are indispensable to us, those which have an inestimable value to me. On the other hand, he will give to the younger daughter all the other side of the mountain, which will also, undoubtedly, be worth a great deal of money later, but is of no value to me. I tried in every possible way to persuade him to interchange these dowries.

I ran against the obstinacy of a mule. He will not change, that's certain. Think, how does it strike you?"

Gontran, much troubled and perplexed, replied:

"What do you think about it, yourself? Do you think he may have had me in mind when he made this division?"

"I don't doubt it. The boor said to himself: 'As long as he likes the younger one, let us keep the money-bags.' He hoped to give you his daughter, while he kept his best lands. And then, perhaps, he wanted to give the elder the advantage. He loves her best—who knows?—she is more like him—she is more shrewd—more clever, more practical. I believe in her thoroughly. Now, were I in your place—I would change my stick to the other shoulder."

But Gontran, dazed, murmured:

"Diable—diable—diable! And Charlotte's lands—you don't want them, then?"

Andermatt exclaimed:

"I—no—a thousand times no! I need those that adjoin my baths, my hotel and my casino. It's very clear. I would give nothing for the others, that can only be sold later, in small lots, to private persons."

Gontran kept repeating:

"Diable—diable—here's a stupid business. Then you advise me?"

"I don't advise you at all. I think that you had better reflect before you decide between the sisters."

"Yes—yes—that's right—I will reflect—first I will sleep—'La nuit porte conseil.' "

He rose, but Andermatt detained him:

"Pardon me, my dear fellow, two words on another subject. I may appear not to understand, but I understand perfectly the allusions you are constantly making, and I wish to hear no more of them.

"You reproach me with being a Jew, that is to say, with making money, being miserly, with being a speculator with methods bordering on swindling. Now, my dear fellow, I spend my life in lending you, that is, *giving* you this money that I earn not without difficulty. But we will end this subject. There is one point, however, that I will not pass over. No, I am not a miser! As a proof of this I give your sister presents of twenty thousand francs at a time, that I gave your father a Theodore Rousseau worth ten thousand francs, just because he fancied it, and that I gave you, when you came here, the horse which you have just ridden to Royat.

"Then in what way am I avaricious? In this, that I will not allow myself to be robbed. And all of my race are like that, and we are right, monsieur. I wish to tell you this once for all. People treat us as if we were misers, because we know exactly the value of things. To you, a piano is a piano, a chair is a chair, a pair of trousers is a pair of trousers. To us they are the same, but these things represent also a value, a definite and precise selling value, which a practical man should estimate at a glance, not for the sake of economy, but so as not to encourage fraud.

"What would you say if a tobacconist asked you four sous for a postage stamp or for a box of wax matches? You would go, monsieur, in search of a policeman for the sake of one sou, yes,

for one sou; you would be so indignant. And that is because you chance to know the value of these two objects. Well, I know the value of all marketable articles, and that indignation which would seize you, if four sous were asked for a stamp, I should experience if I were asked twenty francs for an umbrella that is worth fifteen. Do you understand? I protest against the established, incessant, and abominable robbery of merchants, servants and drivers. I protest against the lack of commercial probity of all your race that despises us. I give fees that I ought to give, proportional to the service rendered, and not the chance fee that you fling away without knowing why, and which varies from five to a hundred sous, depending on the caprice of your mood! Do you understand me?"

Gontran had risen, and smiling with that delicate irony that was so well adapted to his speech, said:

"Yes, my dear fellow, I understand, and you are quite right, much more so than my grandfather, the old Marquis de Ravenel, who scarcely left anything to my poor father, because of the bad habit he had of never taking up change given him by salesmen when he had paid for anything. He thought that was unworthy of a gentleman, and always gave the round sum and the whole coin."

And Gontran went out, with an air of great satisfaction.

CHAPTER III

A CHANGE OF TACTICS

They were just going to take their places at the dinner table in the private dining-room of the Andermatt and Ravenel families, when Gontran threw open the door, and announced: "The Mlles. Oriol."

They came in with embarrassment, pushed forward by Gontran, who laughingly explained:

"See, I carried them both off, on the open street. It made a scandal, I can tell you. I brought them to you by force, because I must explain myself to Mademoiselle Louise, and I could not do it in the center of the town."

He took their hats and their parasols, that they still carried, for they were returning from a walk, made them sit down, kissed his sister, shook hands with his father, his brother-in-law and Paul, and then, turning to Louise Oriol, said:

"And now, mademoiselle, will you tell me what you have had against us for some time?"

She seemed frightened, like a bird caught in a net.

"Why, nothing, monsieur, nothing at all! What made you think that?"

"Why, everything, everything in the world! You do not come to see us. You would not go with us any more in our Noah's Ark [for so he had christened the big landau]. You assume a distant

air when I meet you and speak to you."

"Why, no, monsieur, I assure you."

"Why, yes, mam'zelle, I declare to you. At all events, I don't want it to go on any longer at all, and I am going to make a treaty of peace with you this very day. Oh! you know, I am very obstinate. There is no use in your looking black at me; I know how to get the best of those airs and make you as gracious to me as your sister, who is an angel of gentleness."

Dinner was announced, and they passed into the dining-room. Gontran took Louise's arm.

He was very attentive to her and her sister, and divided his compliments with admirable tact, saying to the younger:

"You, you are our comrade. I am going to neglect you for some days. One takes less trouble for friends than for others, you know."

And he said to the elder:

"Now, you, I am going to fascinate you, mademoiselle, and I warn you as an honest foe, I will even make love to you. Ah! you are blushing, that's a good sign. You will find that I am very nice when I take pains. Isn't that so, Mademoiselle Charlotte?"

And indeed they blushed, both of them, and Louise stammered in her grave way:

"Oh! monsieur, how foolish you are!"

He replied:

"Bah! You will hear a great deal more when you are married and out in society, which won't be long. It's then that men will pay you compliments!"

Christiane and Paul said how glad they were that he had brought Louise Oriol. The marquis smiled and was amused at these childish affectations. Andermatt thought: "He is no fool, the jolly dog." And Gontran was vexed at the rôle he was forced to play, urged by his affection towards Charlotte, and by his interest towards Louise.

He muttered between his teeth, with a grim smile at the latter: "Ah, your old rascal of a father thought that he would play me a trick, but I will carry it off with a high hand over you, my little girl, and you will see if I don't manage it right."

And he compared them as he looked from one to the other. He certainly liked the young one best. She was more entertaining, more vivacious, with her slightly *retroussé* nose, her bright eyes, her straight forehead, and her fine teeth that were a trifle too prominent in her rather large mouth.

Yet the other was handsome, too, though colder and less lively. She would never have the same merry wit, or the charm in home life, but when her name was announced at the opening of a ball: "Madame, the Countess of Ravenel," she would carry off her title well, perhaps better than the younger sister, just as soon as she grew accustomed to it, and to associating with well-bred people. All the same, he was furious, he wanted to get even with them both, with the father and the brother, too; and he promised himself that he would pay them back for this mishap later on when he should be the master.

When they went back to the sitting-room, he had Louise tell fortunes with cards; for she was very clever at forecasting the future. The marquis, Andermatt and Charlotte listened with interest, fascinated, in spite of themselves, by the mystery of the unknown, by the possibility of the improbable, by that unconquerable belief in the marvelous

that haunts mankind, and often disturbs the strongest intellects, when they are confronted with the silliest inventions of charlatans.

Paul and Christiane chatted together in the embrasure of an open window.

She had been wretchedly unhappy for some time past, for she felt that she was no longer tenderly loved. And this shadow that had fallen on their affection was increased every day by the fault of both. She had felt the first suspicion of this unhappy change on the evening of the fête, when she had taken Paul walking on the road. But while she realized that he had no longer the same tenderness in his glance, the same gentleness in his voice, the same intense devotion as before, she was unable to divine the cause of this change.

He felt a boundless desire to escape from her, not to see her any more, never to hear her again harping on this trash about love, that was so tiresome and out of place. He would like to have told her plainly what was in his mind, to explain to her how tactless and foolish her behavior was, but he could not do that, and he dared not leave. But he could not restrain himself from showing her proofs of his impatience by bitter and wounding words.

She was all the more distressed by this, because every day she felt more wretched and ill, and needed more than ever to be consoled, petted, and surrounded with affection. As soon as they were alone in the window seat, she began her tender laments once more.

"Paul, my dear Paul, tell me, do you love me always just as much?"

"Why, yes! But see, you keep asking me that every day; it ends by being monotonous."

"Pardon me! It is because I can no more believe it; and I long for you to reassure me, I long to hear you tell me ceaselessly these words that are so sweet. And as you no longer say them as often as you once did, I must ask, implore and beg for them."

"Oh, well then, I love you! But let's talk of something else, I entreat you!"

"Oh! how hard-hearted you are!"

"Why, no, I am not hard-hearted. Only—only—you don't understand—you don't understand——"

"Oh, yes! I understand very well that you do not love me any more. If you knew how I am grieving!"

"Come, Christiane, I beg you will not make me nervous. If you could only realize how awkwardly you are behaving——"

"Oh! if you love me, you would never speak so."

"But, *sacrebleu,* if I didn't love you still, I would never have come."

"Listen, promise me that if some day, in the future, you should cease to love me, you will tell me."

"Yes, I promise you."

"Will you swear it to me?"

"I swear it to you."

"But then we would stay friends, just the same, wouldn't we?"

"Of course we would stay friends."

"The day when you no longer love me, you will come to me, and you will say to me: 'My little Christiane, I am still fond of you, but it is no longer the same thing. Let us be friends now, only friends.' "

"It's agreed. I promise."

"Will you swear it?"

"I swear it to you."

"Nevertheless, it would cause me great sorrow! How you worshipped me

last year!"

A voice called out behind them:

"Madame la Duchesse de Ramas-Aldaverra!"

She came to make a neighborly call, for Christiane received the principal bathers, every evening, as princes hold receptions in their kingdoms.

Dr. Mazelli followed the handsome Spanish lady with a smiling and deferential air. The two women shook hands, sat down and began to talk.

Andermatt called to Paul:

"My dear friend, do come. Mademoiselle Oriol reads cards wonderfully, and has told us most surprising things."

He took him by the arm, and added:

"What a queer fellow you are, anyway! In Paris we never saw you even once a month, in spite of my wife's invitations. And fifteen letters were required to bring you here. And ever since you have arrived, one would think that you were losing a million francs a day, you have such a woe-begone face. Come, are you concealing some matter that worries you? Perhaps we could help you. You must tell us.

"Here at least you should be in good spirits. I am arranging for you two or three fêtes, that I think will be very successful."

The servant announced: "Madame Barre and Professor Cloche." The latter came in with his daughter, a red-haired, bold-looking widow. Then, almost immediately, the same valet called: "Professor Mas-Roussel."

His wife was with him. She looked pale and worn, and wore her hair drawn tightly back from her forehead.

Professor Remusot had left the evening before, after purchasing his chalet, under what were said to be exceptionally favorable conditions.

The two other doctors would have liked very much to know what these conditions were, but Andermatt only answered: "Oh, we have made advantageous little arrangements for everyone. If you should like to imitate his example, we would see if we could make an agreement—we would see. When you have decided, if you will let me know, we will talk it over."

Dr. Latonne appeared in his turn, then Dr. Honorat, without his wife, whom he did not take out with him.

The sound of voices now filled the room, a murmur of conversation. Gontran did not leave Louise Oriol for a moment; he bent down confidentially, chatting in her ear, and from time to time said laughingly to someone passing near:

"She is an enemy of whom I am making a conquest."

Mazelli was seated near Professor Cloche's daughter. For several days he had followed her all the time, and she received his advances with provoking boldness.

The duchess did not let them out of her sight, and seemed to be trembling with anger. Suddenly she rose, crossed the parlor, and broke up her doctor's tête-à-tête with the handsome red-haired widow.

"Come, Mazelli, we must go back. I do not feel quite well."

As soon as they were gone, Christiane, who had drawn near Paul, said to him:

"Poor woman! How much she must suffer!"

He asked carelessly:

"Whom do you mean?"

"The duchess. Don't you see how

jealous she is?"

He answered roughly:

"If you are going to wail over everything that you can get hold of, you will never make an end of weeping."

She turned away, ready to weep, truly, for she thought him cruel, and she sat down near Charlotte Oriol, who was left alone, surprised and not understanding what Gontran meant. Christiane said to her, in such a way that the young girl would not understand to what her words referred:

"There are days when one wishes one were dead."

Andermatt, amid a group of doctors, was telling of the extraordinary case of Père Clovis, whose legs were coming to life again. He seemed so convinced of it that no one could have doubted his good faith.

After he saw through the trick of the peasants and the paralytic, and realized that he had allowed himself to be duped and deceived the year before, simply because of the devouring wish he had to believe in the efficacy of the springs, and especially after he had been unable to free himself from the complaints of the old rascal, without bribing him, he had turned it into a telling advertisement, and worked wonders with it.

Mazelli just came in again, free now to do as he liked, since he had escorted his patient to her own apartment.

Gontran took his arm.

"Give me now, my handsome doctor, an opinion. Which of the Oriol girls do you like best?"

The handsome doctor whispered in his ear:

"For a sweetheart the younger, for a wife the elder."

Gontran laughed:

"Well, well, we are of exactly the same opinion. I am delighted!"

Then he went to his sister, who was still talking with Charlotte, and said:

"You don't know about it, do you? I have just decided that on Thursday we will go to the Puy de la Nugère. It's the finest crater in the whole mountain chain. Everyone says they will go. It's settled."

Christiane murmured indifferently:

"I will do whatever you like."

But Professor Cloche, followed by his daughter, came up to take leave, and Mazelli, offering to escort them back, went out behind the young widow.

All the company left in a few minutes, for Christiane retired at eleven o'clock.

The marquis, Paul and Gontran took the Oriol girls home. Gontran and Louise went on ahead, and Brétigny, walking a few steps behind them, felt Charlotte's arm tremble a little as it rested on his.

They all separated, calling to one another: "On Thursday at eleven, for lunch at the hotel."

As they were returning, they met Andermatt, who was detained in a corner of the park by Professor Mas-Roussel, who was saying:

"All right, if convenient to you, I will call to talk over with you to-morrow morning that little matter of the chalet."

William joined the young men as they went in, and drawing close to his brother-in-law's ear, whispered:

"My best compliments, my dear boy, you did admirably."

Gontran for the past two years had been harassed so much by the need of

funds that his whole life had been spoiled. While he had been squandering the fortune that he inherited from his mother, he had allowed himself to live along with the careless indifference of his father, among a set of young men who were rich, blasé, and fast, that were mentioned every morning in the papers, who belonged to society, but went out in it very little, for they preferred the companionship of fast women.

There were a dozen of the same set that met every evening at the same café on the boulevard, between midnight and three o'clock in the morning. Handsomely dressed, always wearing dress coats and white waistcoats, with shirt studs worth twenty louis, that they changed every month and bought at first-class jewelers', they lived with the single aim of amusing themselves, picking up women, about whom they talked, and getting money in all possible ways.

As they knew nothing except the scandals of yesterday, the echoes of alcoves and stables, duels and gambling tales, their horizon of thought was bounded by these limits.

They had known all the women who frequented the boulevards. They passed them on, gave them up, exchanged them and talked together of their points, as they might of those of a race-horse. They also mixed in the ultra-fashionable and titled society that is talked so much about, and in which nearly all the women carry on recognized intrigues. They discussed these women just as they did the others, and hardly recognized any distinction among them except for slight differences due to birth and social position.

As a result of using all sorts of tricks to get the money necessary for this kind of life: deceiving usurers, borrowing on all sides, putting off tradesmen, laughing in the tailor's face when he brought every six months a bill that had increased three thousand francs, listening to stories of the trickeries of unscrupulous women, watching people cheat in clubs, feeling that they themselves were robbed by everyone—by servants, merchants, managers of large restaurants, and others—being cognizant of or connected with certain underhand money dealings, or dubious transactions, from which they hoped to get a few louis, their moral sense had become dulled and threadbare, and their sole point of honor consisted in fighting a duel the moment they were suspected of all the things of which they were capable or culpable.

All of this set, or nearly all, always finished at the end of about ten years of this sort of life, in a wealthy marriage, a scandal, a suicide, or a mysterious disappearance, as complete as death.

They counted principally on a wealthy marriage. Some trusted to their families to secure one, others looked around themselves without its being apparent, and they had lists of heiresses just as there are lists of houses for sale. They kept watch especially over the foreigners, North and South Americans, whom they dazzled by their fine style, their fame as men of the world, by reports of their success and the elegance of their appearance.

And the tradesmen also counted a great deal on the prospect of a wealthy marriage.

But the hunt after a girl with a rich dowry might be a long one. In any case it required investigations, and the

exertion of fascinating the girl. It involved fatigues, visits, a great display of energy, of which Gontran, by nature careless, was absolutely incapable.

For a long time he had said to himself, feeling every day more pinched for the lack of money: "And yet, I must think about it." But he never did think of it, and saw no way out of his difficulty.

He was reduced to ingenious devices to obtain small sums, to all those dubious proceedings of people who are at the end of their resources, and finally to long sojourns with his family, when Andermatt had suddenly suggested to him the idea of marrying one of the young Oriol girls.

At first he had kept silent, out of prudence, although the young girl appeared at first glance too far beneath him for him to be willing to consent to such an unequal marriage. But some moments of reflection had soon changed his view, and he had decided to woo her jestingly—a rapid fire flirtation—that would not compromise him, and would give him a chance to back out.

As he understood his brother-in-law perfectly, he knew that this proposition had been well thought out, weighed and arranged by him, that he considered her a great prize, difficult to find elsewhere.

There was no trouble to take either, except to stoop down and pick up a pretty girl, for he liked the younger very much, and he had often thought that she might be very agreeable to meet later on.

So he had chosen Charlotte Oriol, and in a short time had brought matters to the point when a formal proposal could be made.

Then, as a result of the father's giving his other daughter the dowry coveted by Andermatt, Gontran was obliged either to give up the marriage or to turn to the elder daughter.

His dissatisfaction was very great, and he had strongly thought at first of sending his brother-in-law to the devil, and remaining a bachelor until a new chance turned up.

But just then he was quite out of pocket, so much so that he had had to ask, for his play at the casino, for twenty-five louis from Paul, after many other sums he had borrowed and never returned. And then he would have to hunt for a rich wife, find her and win her. Perhaps he would have to struggle against the opposition of her family, while, without moving from the place, he could with a few days of attentive courting get the elder Oriol girl, just as he had known how to make a conquest of the younger. He would then be sure of having in his brother-in-law a banker whom he could make always responsible, everlastingly reproach, and whose cash-box would always be open to him.

As far as his wife was concerned, he would take her to Paris, and introduce her as the daughter of Andermatt's partner. Besides, she bore the name of the hot springs resort, to which he would never bring her back, never! never! in virtue of the law that rivers do not flow back to their sources. She had a nice face and figure, and was sufficiently distinguished to become very distinguished looking, intelligent enough to understand society, to hold her own, and take her place in it, and even to do him honor. His friends would say: "That jester there has married a handsome girl, and he seems to think that it was not a bad joke." Indeed, it would

not be a joke on him at all, for he intended when he was married to resume his bachelor life with money in his pockets.

Thus he had turned to Louise Oriol, and profiting unconsciously by the jealousy wakened in the shy heart of the young girl, had stirred in her a dormant coquetry, and a vague wish to take from her sister this handsome lover that everyone called: "Monsieur le Comte."

She had not formulated this, she had not thought it out, or contrived it, for she was wholly surprised by their meeting, and his carrying them off. But when she saw him so attentive and courteous, she felt, from his manner, his glances, and his whole attitude, that he was no longer in love with Charlotte, and without seeking to see further, she felt happy, joyful, almost victorious, as she was going to sleep.

On Thursday, they hesitated a long time before starting for the Puy de la Nugère. The overcast sky and the damp air made them fear rain. But Gontran insisted so much that he finally carried off those who could not make up their minds. Lunch had been a solemn affair. Christiane and Paul had quarrelled the evening before, for no apparent cause. Andermatt feared that Gontran's marriage would not take place, for Père Oriol had spoken of him that very morning in ambiguous terms. Gontran, who had been told of this, was furious, and determined to succeed. Charlotte, who felt a presentiment of her sister's triumph, without understanding at all the cause of this sudden change, was very anxious to stay in the village. Only with difficulty could they persuade her to go.

So the Noah's Ark, filled to the limit, carried its usual passengers toward the high plateau that commands a view of Volvic.

Louise Oriol, who had suddenly become very talkative, did the honors of the trip. She told how the rock underlying Volvic, which is simply the lava-flow from surrounding peaks, was used for building all the churches and houses of the country round. And this it is that gives to the towns of Auvergne their somber, charred look. She showed her companions the stone-yards where this rock was cut, pointed out the lava-flow that is worked as a quarry, from which the rough lava is taken out. Then she made them look with admiration at the colossal black Virgin who stands on a height and bends over the city of Volvic, which she protects.

After that, they climbed up toward the higher plateau, which is studded with extinct volcanoes. The horses walked with sure steps up the long, difficult road. Green woodlands bordered the way. And no one spoke any more.

Christiane was thinking of Tazenat. It was the same carriage! The people were the same, but their hearts were changed. Everything seemed as it was then! And yet—and yet! What had happened? Almost nothing! A little more love on her side! A little less on his! Almost nothing—the difference between growing and dying desire! Almost nothing!—the invisible rent that weariness makes in affection! Oh! almost nothing, almost nothing! And the changed glances of the eyes, for the same eyes no longer seem to see the same face! What is in a glance? Almost nothing! The driver stopped and said: "It's here, to the right, along the footpath, in the wood. You have only to follow the

path to reach the place."

They all got down from the carriage, except the marquis, who thought that the weather was too warm. Louise and Gontran went on ahead, and Charlotte stayed behind with Paul and Christiane, who walked slowly. The way through the wood seemed to them very long. When they came to a crest covered with tall grasses, which led by an ascending slope to the edge of the ancient crater, Louise and Gontran, who were both tall and slender, when they reached the summit, looked as if they were standing in the clouds. When the rest had caught up with them, Paul Brétigny's enthusiastic soul burst forth into poetry.

Around them, behind them, to the right, to the left, they were surrounded by strange, truncated cones, some rising prominently, others crushed down, but all preserving their strange aspect of extinct volcanoes. These heavy bases of mountains, with their flat summits, extended from south to west, on a vast, desolate-looking plateau which, rising itself to a height of a thousand meters above Limagne, commanded a view of it further than the eye could reach, toward the east and north, toward the invisible horizon, always blue, always veiled in haze.

The Puy de Dôme, on the right, surpassed all its fellows with seventy to eighty now dormant craters. Farther on, rose the Puys de Gravenoire, de Crouel, de la Pedge, de Sault, de Noschamps, de la Vâche. Nearer were the Puy du Pariou, the Puy de Côme, and the Puys de Jumes, de Tressoux, de Louchadiere: a vast cemetery of volcanoes.

The young people looked at this with wonder. At their feet was the hollow of the first crater of la Nugère, a deep, grassy basin at the bottom of which one could still see three enormous blocks of brown lava, raised with the monster's last breath and sunk again into his dying throat, remaining there centuries on centuries, forever.

Gontran shouted:

"I intend to go down to the bottom. I want to see how they give up the ghost, these monsters. Come, Mesdemoiselles, let's have a little race down the slope. And catching Louise's arm, he drew her on. Charlotte followed, running behind them; then suddenly she stopped, watched them flying along, springing on arm in arm, and then, turning suddenly, she climbed up again towards Christiane and Paul, who were sitting on the grass at the crest of the slope. When she rejoined them, she fell on her knees, and hiding her face in Christiane's dress, began to sob bitterly.

Christiane, who had understood, and whom all the griefs of others had lately pierced like wounds in her own soul, threw her arms around her neck, and, touched by her tears, murmured: "Poor little one, poor little one!" The girl continued weeping, prostrate, her face hidden, and with her hands that had fallen on the ground she tore up the grass, unconscious of what she was doing.

Brétigny had risen, so as not to appear to have seen her, but the young girl's misery, the distress of this innocent heart, filled him suddenly with anger against Gontran. He, whom the deep anguish of Christiane exasperated, was touched to the depths of his heart by this first disillusion of a young girl.

He came back and knelt down in his turn to speak to her:

"There, there, calm yourself, I en-

treat you. They will come back again, calm yourself. They must not see you crying."

She sprang up, frightened at the thought that her sister might find her with tears in her eyes. Her throat was full of sobs that she held back—that she swallowed—that sank into her heart to make it more full of pain. She faltered:

"Yes—yes—it's over—it's nothing—it's all over—look—you don't notice it any more—do you—you don't notice it any more?"

Christiane wiped the tears from her face with her handkerchief; then dried her own eyes. She said to Paul:

"Do go and see what they are doing. We can't see them any more. They are hidden behind the blocks of lava. I will stay with this little girl and comfort her."

Brétigny had risen again, and said in a trembling voice:

"I will go—and I will bring them back, but there will be something for me to settle with—your brother—this very day—and he shall explain his unjustifiable conduct after what he told us the other day."

He started to run down to the center of the crater.

Gontran, dragging Louise along, had rushed with all his force down the steep descent of the great hole, to hold her up, support her, make her breathless, dizzy and frightened. Swept along by this wild rush, she tried to stop him, gasping: "Oh! not so fast. I shall fall —why, you are mad. I shall fall!" They were stopped by the blocks of lava, and stood both breathless beside them. Then they walked round the crater, and looked at the great rifts that formed a sort of cavern with two openings at the base of the crater.

When the dying volcano had thrown up this last mass of foaming lava, no longer able to hurl it to the sky, as it had done, it spewed it out, thick and half-cooled, and the mass froze on its dying lips.

"We must go in under there," said Gontran.

And he pushed the young girl in before him. Then, as soon as they were inside the grotto, he said:

"Well, mademoiselle, now is the time to make you a declaration."

She was astounded.

"A declaration—to me!"

"Why, yes, in four words: I think you charming."

"You should say that to my sister."

"Oh! you know very well that I am not making a declaration to your sister!"

"Come, now!"

"Look here, you aren't a woman if you haven't understood that I paid attentions to her just to see what you would think of it! And what black looks you gave me! You looked furious! Oh! how pleased I was! Then I tried to show you with all possible consideration, what I thought of you!"

No one had ever talked to her thus. She felt confused and delighted—her heart full of pride and joy.

He resumed:

"I know that I've acted shabbily to your little sister. Oh! well, so much the worse. She hasn't been deceived, not she, don't think it. You see that she staid up on the hill, and that she did not want to come with us. Oh! she understood, she understood!"

He caught one of Louise Oriol's hands

and gently kissed the ends of her fingers, courteously, murmuring:

"How nice you are! How nice you are!"

She leaned against the wall of lava, and heard her heart beating with excitement, but she said nothing. The only thought that floated through her troubled mind, was a thought of triumph: she had got the best of her sister.

But a shadow fell across the entrance of the grotto. Paul Brétigny was watching them. Gontran let the little hand fall that he held to his lips, in an easy way, and he said:

"Oh, here you are. Are you alone?"

"Yes, we were astonished to see you disappear under here."

"Well, we will come back, my dear fellow. We were examining this. Isn't it rather curious?"

Louise, blushing to her temples, went out first, and the young men followed her and talked together in low voices.

Christiane and Charlotte watched them come and waited for them, hand in hand.

They walked back towards the carriage, where the marquis had staid; and the Noah's Ark started on its way back to Enval.

Suddenly, in the midst of a little pine forest, the landau stopped, and the driver began to swear. A dead ass blocked their way. Everyone wanted to see, and got down. He was stretched out on the blackish dust, sombre-hued himself, and so thin that his worn skin, where the bones projected, seemed as though it would have been broken through by them, if the poor beast had not breathed his last. All the skeleton showed through the worn hair on his sides, and his head seemed enormous. The poor head, with closed eyes, was lying so tranquilly on the bed of broken stone, so peaceful in death, that it seemed surprised and happy at this new rest. The long ears hung down like rags. Two open wounds on his knees told how often he had fallen, even that very day, before he had sunk down for the last time. Another wound on his side showed the place where his master, for years and years, had prodded him with an iron spike fastened to the end of a stick, to hasten his slow gait.

The driver took hold of his hind legs and dragged him towards a ditch. And his neck stretched out as if to bray once more, to utter one last plaint. When he was on the grass, the man muttered furiously:

"What brutes to leave that in the middle of the road!"

No one else had spoken; they got back into the carriage.

Christiane, heartbroken, overcome, saw all the pitiful life of the creature, that had ended thus on the roadside. First the happy little donkey, with his big head and great shining eyes, a comical and good-natured little fellow, with his rough hair and long ears, gamboling about, still free, beside his mother. Then the first cart, the first uphill pull, the first blows! And then, and then, the incessant and terrible trips along the interminable roads! Blows! blows! Too heavy loads, overpoweringly hot suns! And for food, only a little straw, a little hay, some branches of leaves, and the tempting sight of the green meadows, all along the hard way.

And then later, as age came on, the iron spike replaced the supple switch,

and the dreadful martyrdom of the worn-out creature, breathless, bruised, always dragging excessive loads, suffering in every limb, in all its old body, worn shabby as a beggar's coat. And then death, merciful death, three paces from the grass of the roadside ditch, to which a man who is passing drags him, swearing, to clear the road.

Christiane for the first time understood the misery of creatures that are enslaved. Death also seemed to her, at moments, very kind.

Suddenly they passed by a little cart that was dragged along by a man, nearly naked, a woman in tatters, and an emaciated dog, all exhausted with fatigue.

One could see how they were sweating and gasping. The dog, lean and mangy, with his tongue hanging out, was fastened underneath, between the forewheels. In the little cart was wood gathered up, stolen, no doubt, roots, stumps, broken branches that seemed to hide some other things. Then on top of the branches were rags, and lying on the rags was an infant—nothing but a face appearing out of the gray tatters, a round ball with two eyes, a nose, and a mouth!

And that was a family, a human family! The ass had succumbed to exhaustion, and the man, without pity for his dead servant, without even pushing it as far as the rut, had left it in the middle of the road. Then, yoking himself up in his turn, with his wife in the empty shafts, they had begun to drag the cart as the animal had done just before. They were going on! Where? To do what? Had they even a few sous? That cart—would they drag it always, unable to buy another animal? On what would they live? Where would they stop? They would probably die as their donkey had died. And their child would do as they did, that little creature, still unformed, that was hidden under the wretched rags.

Christiane was thinking of all this, and new emotions surged in the depths of her startled soul, as she caught this glimpse of the misery of the poor.

Gontran said, all at once:

"I don't know why, but I think it would be delightful for us all to take dinner at the Café Anglais. It would give me pleasure to see the boulevard."

The marquis muttered:

"Bah! we are comfortable here. The new hotel is much better than the old."

They passed by Tournoël. A memory made Christiane's heart throb as she recognized a chestnut tree. She looked at Paul, but he had closed his eyes and did not see at all her meek appeal.

Ere long, they saw two men in front of the carriage, two vine-dressers, returning from their work, who carried their rakes on their shoulders, and walked with the long, weary step of laborers.

The Oriol girls blushed to their temples. It was their father and their brother, who had returned to the vineyards, as of old, and passed their days sweating over the ground that had made them rich, and bent double, with the sun on their backs, they cultivated it from morning till night, while their fine frock coats, carefully folded, reposed in the bureau, and the tall hats in a closet.

The two peasants greeted them with a friendly smile, while those in the landau waved their hands in reply to their "Good-evening."

As soon as they had returned, as Gontran was getting down from the Ark to go up to the casino, Brétigny went with him, and stopped him after the first few steps.

"Listen, my dear fellow, what you are doing is not right, and I have promised your sister to speak to you about it."

"To speak to me about what?"

"Of your way of behaving for the past few days."

Gontran assumed his insolent air.

"Of acting? Towards whom?"

"Towards that girl that you are casting off cruelly."

"You think so?"

"Yes, I think so—and I have reason to think so."

"Bah! you seem to have grown very scrupulous on the subject of jilting."

"But, my dear friend, it's not a question of a gay woman, but of a young girl."

"I know it very well, and for that reason I have not betrayed her. The difference is very marked."

They walked on, side by side. Gontran's manners exasperated Paul, who replied:

"If I were not your friend, I should say very harsh words to you."

"And I would not permit you to say them."

"Come, listen, my dear fellow, this child rouses my pity. She was crying a little while ago."

"Bah! she was crying? Well, that's flattering to me!"

"Look here, don't joke about this. What are you expecting to do?"

"I? Nothing."

"But think, you have gone so far as to compromise her. You said to us the other day, to your sister and me, that you were thinking of marrying her."

Gontran stopped, and said in a mocking tone, tinged with a threat:

"My sister and you had better not occupy yourselves with the love affairs of others. I told you that I rather liked that girl, and that if I chanced to marry her, it would be a good and sensible act. That's all. Now it happens that to-day I like the elder more. I've changed my opinion. That happens to everyone."

Then, looking Paul full in the face:

"What do you do yourself, when a woman no longer pleases you? Do you treat her kindly?"

Taken by surprise, Paul Brétigny tried to sound the deep meaning, the hidden meaning, of these words. His head, too, grew hot, and he said violently:

"Once more I say that it is not a question of a worthless woman, or of a married woman, but of a young girl, whom you have deceived, if not by promises, at least by your manner. That is not, do you understand, the part of a courteous man! nor of an honorable man!"

Gontran, pale as death, with a breaking voice, exclaimed:

"Stop! You have already said too much—and I have listened too long. In my turn, if I were not your friend I—I would show you that my temper is quick. One word more, and everything is finished between us forever."

Then, weighing his words slowly, and hurling them at Paul's face, he said:

"I have no explanations to give you—I might have more right to demand them from you. That which does not become a courteous man, nor an honor-

able man, is a certain indelicacy—which may have many forms—from which friendship should restrain certain people—and which love cannot excuse."

Suddenly, changing his tone, and almost joking, he said:

"Now, as to this little Charlotte, if she touches your pity, and pleases you, take her and marry her. Marriage is often the solution of difficult situations. It's a solution and a stronghold, in which to barricade oneself against clinging despairs. She is pretty and rich! You will have to end with some such accident as that! It would be amusing for us to be married here, on the same day, for, as far as I am concerned, I shall marry the elder. I am telling you this as a secret; do not announce it yet. Meantime do not forget that you, yourself, have less right than anyone to ever speak of honor in questions of sentiment and of qualms in those of love. And now go back to your affairs. I shall attend to mine. Good-night."

And abruptly changing the direction in which he was going, he went down towards the village. Paul Brétigny, full of doubt and anxiety, went back with slow steps towards the "Mont-Oriol."

He tried to really understand it all, to recall every word so as to study and determine its meaning, and he wondered at the secret, unavowable, and shameful winding ways that may lie hidden in some souls.

When Christiane asked him:

"What was Gontran's answer to you?"

He stammered:

"He—he prefers the elder, at present—I even believe that he wants to marry her. And in answer to my keen reproaches, he sealed my lips by allusions—alarming—to us both."

Christiane sank down in a chair, murmuring:

"Oh! *Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*"

But as Gontran just came in, for the dinner bell had rung, he gaily kissed her forehead, asking:

"Well, little sister, how are you? You are not too tired?"

Then he shook hands with Paul, and turned to Andermatt who had come in behind him, and asked:

"Tell me now, jewel of brothers-in-law, husbands, and friends, can you estimate for me exactly the price of an old ass, dead on the roadside?"

CHAPTER IV

AN ANNOUNCEMENT

ANDERMATT and Dr. Latonne were walking in front of the casino, on the terrace decorated with the imitation marble vases.

"He doesn't even bow to me any more," said the doctor, who was talking of his colleague, Bonnefille, "and he stays over there in his hole like a wild boar. I believe that he would poison our springs, if he could."

Andermatt, with his hands behind his back, his hat pushed back so far that

t let the baldness be seen, was thinking. At length he said:

"Oh, in three months the company will have given in. We might have it at about ten thousand francs. It's this miserable Bonnefille who stirs them up against me, and makes them believe that I will yield. But he is mistaken."

"You know they have closed their casino. No one was left," said the new superintendent.

"Yes, I know it, but we haven't enough people here, ourselves. They stay at the hotels too much, and in the hotels one gets bored, my dear friend. We must amuse the bathers, distract them, make them think the season here too short. The guests of our Mont-Oriol hotel come every evening because they are near, but the others hesitate and stay in their own apartments. It's a question of routes of bringing them here, nothing else. Success hinges always on imperceptible causes, that one must know how to discover. It must be so arranged that the routes leading to a place of entertainment must themselves be pleasurable, an introduction to the pleasure that one is about to enjoy.

"The ways leading here are rough, stony, and hard; they fatigue the visitors. When a path to a certain place, where one wishes vaguely to go, is smooth, wide, shaded during the day, easy and not steep for the evening, one of necessity chooses that path in preference to the others. If you realized that the body retains the memory of a thousand things that the mind has not taken the trouble to remember! I believe that this is the basis of the memory of animals! If you have ever suffered from the heat in going to a certain place, hurt your feet on rough stone, found an ascent too steep, even while you were thinking of something else, you will experience an unconquerable, physical repugnance to returning to that place. You were chatting with a friend, you had not noticed the slight discomfort of the walk, you looked at nothing, you observed nothing. But your legs, your muscles, your lungs, your whole body has not forgotten it, and all say to your mind, when the mind wishes to take them back along the same path: 'No, I won't go, I suffered too much.' And the mind obeys this refusal without disputing it, and submits to this mute language of the companions who carry it about.

"Therefore we must have fine roads, which amounts to saying that I must have the lands of this mule of a Père Oriol. But patience! Ah! in this connection, Mas-Roussel has become the owner of his chalet on the same conditions that we offered Remusot. It's a slight sacrifice for which he will give us a large indemnity. Try to find out exactly what Cloche's intentions are."

"He will do the same as the others," said the doctor. "But there is still a matter that I have been thinking over for some days, and that we have completely forgotten; it is the meteorological bulletin."

"What meteorological bulletin?"

"In the large Paris newspapers! It's indispensable! The climate of a hot-springs resort must be better, less variable, more equable, than that of the neighboring, rival resorts. You subscribe to the weather report in the papers, and I will send every evening, by telegraph, the atmospheric conditions. I will arrange it so that the average, calculated

at the close of the year, shall be better than the best averages of the surrounding resorts. The very first thing that strikes our eyes, on opening the big newspapers, is the temperature at Vichy, Royat, Mont-Doré, and Châtel-Guyon, during the summer season, and during the winter, that at Cannes, Menton, Nice, Saint-Raphaël. It must always be warm and lovely in those places, my dear sir, so that the Parisian will say: 'Heavens, how lucky those people are who can go down there!'"

Andermatt exclaimed:

"*Sacrebleu!* you are right. How was it that I never thought of that? I will attend to it this very day. Talking of practical things, have you written to Professors De Larenard and Pascalis? Those are two that I should like very much to get here."

"Unapproachable, my dear president —unless—unless they can assure themselves independently, after many trials, that our springs are excellent. But with them, persuasion will accomplish nothing—before the right time."

They passed by Paul and Gontran, who had come for coffee after lunch. Other bathers came in, chiefly men, for the women, when they rose from the table, always went to their rooms for an hour or two. Petrus Martel was superintending his waiters and shouted: "A kümmel, a small glass of brandy, an anisette," in the same deep, thundering voice that he would assume an hour later in conducting the rehearsal and giving the prompt to the actress who played the part of the heroine.

Andermatt stopped for several moments to talk with the young men, then he resumed his walk by the side of the inspector.

Gontran, with his legs crossed, his arms folded, was lolling back in his chair, resting his neck on the back, with his eyes and cigar pointed heavenward, and smoked, steeped in perfect happiness.

Suddenly, he asked:

"Would you like to take a trip, in a little while, to the valley of Sans-Souci? The girls will be there."

Paul hesitated, then after a moment's thought, he said:

"Yes, I'd like to go."

Then he added:

"Is your love affair going on all right?"

"*Parbleu!* I've caught her. She can't escape now."

Gontran had now made his friend his confidant, and told him day by day about his progress and success. He even got him to be present as an accomplice at their meetings, for he had arranged, very ingeniously, trysting-places with Louise Oriol.

After the excursion to the Puy de la Nugère Christiane had put an end to trips by hardly going out at all, which made it very difficult to plan meetings.

Her brother, whose plans were at first upset by his sister's attitude, thought up ways of getting out of this difficulty.

Accustomed as he was to Parisian morals, where women are considered by men of his stamp as game which are often difficult to hunt, he had employed in the past many schemes to approach those whom he fancied. He knew better than any one how to use go-betweens, to find out those who would act through interested motives, and to sound with a glance the men or women who would be disposed to help him.

When Christiane's unconscious aid

suddenly failed him, he looked about him for the needed connecting bolt, the "pliant character," as he said, to replace his sister. His choice fell at once on Dr. Honorat's wife. Many reasons pointed to her as the one. To begin with, her husband, who was very intimate with the Oriols, had attended this family for twenty years. He dined with them every Sunday, and entertained them at his house every Tuesday. His wife, who was a fat old woman, of ordinary family, but very pretentious, and easily won through her vanity, would give every help to forward the wishes of the Count de Ravenel, whose brother-in-law was the owner of the establishment of Mont-Oriol.

Besides, Gontran, who was a good judge of go-betweens, felt sure by just seeing her pass by in the street, that she would naturally act the part. She has the right physical make up for it, he thought, and when one has the physical qualities for an employment, one has the mental as well.

So he had gone to see her one day, after he had walked home with her husband to his own door. He sat down and chatted and complimented the lady, and when the dinner bell rang he said as he rose:

"What a savory smell! You have better cooking than at the hotel."

Madame Honorat, puffed up with pride, faltered:

"*Mon Dieu*—if I dared—if I dared, Monsieur le Comte."

"If you dared what, dear madame?"

"To beg you to partake of our humble meal."

"*Ma foi—ma foi*—I would say, yes."

The doctor anxiously muttered:

"But we have nothing, nothing: soup, beef, a chicken, that's all."

Gontran laughed:

"That's enough for me, I accept."

So he had dined with the Honorat family. The fat hostess rose, took the dishes from the hands of the servant so that the sauce should not be spilt on the tablecloth and, in spite of her husband's vexation, did all the waiting herself.

The count congratulated her on her cooking, on her house, and admired her hospitality, and left her burning with enthusiasm.

He had gone again to make his dinner call, accepted a new invitation, and now was all the time at Madame Honorat's home, where the Oriol girls had been in the habit for many years of running in any moment, as neighbors and friends.

Thus it happened that he spent hours there with the three women, and was always kind to both sisters, but showed clearly from day to day his marked preference for Louise.

The jealousy that had sprung up between the sisters from the moment that he had showed attention to Charlotte, took the form of dislike on the part of the elder, and of contempt on the part of the younger. Louise, in spite of her reserved air, threw into her reticence and her restrained manner that she showed towards Gontran, more coquetry and encouragement than the other had ever shown in moments of freest and most joyous gaiety. Charlotte, wounded to the heart, concealed her suffering through pride. She pretended to observe nothing, to understand nothing, and continued to go to all the meetings at Madame Honorat's with an air of great indifference. She did not want to stay

at home for fear people would suspect that she was grieving, that she was crying, that she was surrendering her place to her sister.

Gontran, too proud of his cleverness to hide it, could not resist telling Paul. And Paul, who thought it very funny, had laughed. Besides, after the ambiguous remarks of his friend, he had made up his mind not to meddle in his affair.

Then when Gontran told to what use he was putting Madame Honorat, Brétigny had laughed, and for some time he had even let himself be invited to her home, and took great pleasure in chatting with Charlotte.

The doctor's wife lent herself, with the best grace in the world, to the rôle that they made her play. She served them with five o'clock tea, like the ladies in Paris, and with little cakes made by her own hands.

The first time that Paul found his way to her house, she welcomed him like an old friend, made him sit down, relieved him of his hat, in spite of his protests, and put it on the mantel by the clock. Then, enormously big and fat, she bustled about from one to another, and asked with eager hospitality:

"Do you feel inclined for a little bit of dinner?"

Gontran made nonsense, joked, and laughed with complete assurance. He detained Louise for several moments in the embrasure of a window, under the troubled eye of Charlotte.

Madame Honorat, who was talking with Paul, said to him in a motherly tone:

"These dear children come here to chat together for a little while. It is very innocent, isn't it, Monsieur Brétigny?"

"Oh! very innocent, madame."

The next time he came, she called him familiarly, "Monsieur Paul," treating him a little like a crony.

After that Gontran told in his bright chaffing way of all her obliging help. He had said to the lady, the day before:

"Why do you never go out strolling with the young ladies on the Sans-Souci road?"

"Why, we will go, Monsieur le Comte, we will go."

"How about to-morrow, towards three o'clock?"

"To-morrow, at about three o'clock, Monsieur le Comte."

"You are very kind, Madame Honorat."

"I am at your service, Monsieur le Comte."

Gontran explained to Paul:

"You see, in this sitting-room, I can't say anything a little earnest to the elder before the younger. But in the woods I can either go on ahead or stay behind with Louise! Then you will come with us?"

"Yes, I'd like to very much."

"Let's start on."

They got up and stepped off very quietly along the main road, then, after passing through Roche-Pradière, they turned to the left and went down to the wooded dale through tangled thickets. When they had crossed the little brook, they sat down on the edge of the path and waited.

The three ladies came soon, walking in single file, Louise leading and Madame Honorat bringing up the rear. They appeared to be very much surprised on both sides at having met.

Gontran exclaimed:

"Well, what a happy thought you had to come this way!"

The doctor's wife replied:

"It was I who had that happy idea!"

And they continued their walk.

Louise and Gontran gradually hastened their pace, took the lead and got so far ahead that the others lost sight of them in the windings of the narrow path.

The fat lady, panting, murmured as she glanced towards them indulgently:

"Bah! they're young, they have good legs. For my part, I can't keep up with them."

Charlotte exclaimed:

"Wait, I'll call them back."

She started to run after them, but the doctor's wife detained her:

"Don't bother them, my dear, if they want to talk! It's not nice to interrupt them, they will come back of their own accord."

And she sat down on the grass under the shade of a pine, and fanned herself with her handkerchief. Charlotte cast a look of distress towards Paul, an imploring and despairing glance.

He understood, and said:

"All right, mademoiselle, we will leave madame here to rest, and we will rejoin your sister, we two."

She answered eagerly:

"Oh! yes, monsieur."

Madame Honorat made no objection.

"Go on, children, go on. I'll wait for you here. Don't be too long."

And they went on by themselves in their turn. They walked rapidly, at first, not seeing the others and hoping to catch up to them. Then, after some minutes they decided that Louise and Gontran must have turned to the right or left and gone through the woods. Charlotte called in a trembling and repressed voice. No one answered. She whispered: "Oh! *Mon Dieu,* where are they?"

Paul felt himself overcome once more by that deep pity, that tender sympathy that had taken such hold on him before, on the edge of the crater of Nugère.

He did not know what to say to this poor child in such distress. He had a strong fatherly wish to take her in his arms and kiss her, and to think of sweet, comforting things to say to her. But what should he say? She turned to look on every side, peering through the branches wildly, and listening for the slightest sounds. She faltered:

"I think they are here. No, over there. Do you hear them?"

"No, mademoiselle, I hear nothing. It is best to wait for them here."

"Oh, no! We must find them!"

He hesitated several moments, then he said very softly:

"Then this makes you very unhappy?"

She raised her distracted eyes, in which the tears began to gather, veiling them in a light, transparent mist, still held back by the lids fringed with long, brown lashes. She tried to speak, but could not, dared not. Yet her swelling heart, repressed, and so full of grief, longed to unburden itself.

He went on:

"So you loved him very much. He is unworthy of your love. Don't grieve."

She could control herself no longer, and hiding her tears with her hands, she sobbed:

"No—no—I don't love him—not that man—it's too cruel to act like that! He has played with my affection—it's

too base—it's too cowardly—but all the same, it hurts me—very much—because it's hard—very hard—oh! yes. But what grieves me worst of all—is my sister—my sister—who does not love me either—has been more unkind than he. I feel that she hates me. I had only her. I have no one any more—and yet I have done nothing!"

He saw only her ear and her fresh young neck, sinking into the collar of her dress, under the light material that she wore, and blending into the soft outlines of her breast. And he was overcome with compassion, and tenderness, carried away by that impetuous need of devotion that possessed him every time a woman touched his soul. And his soul, which was so ready to burst into enthusiasms, was stirred in the face of this innocent, distressing, artless, and cruelly charming grief.

And with an unconscious gesture, such as one makes to fondle and soothe children, he stretched out his arm, and put it on her shoulder. Then he could feel her heart throbbing, like the little heart of a bird one has caught. And this throbbing thrilled along his arm towards his own heart that kept up with the tireless *"Arête-de-Veau"* and which came from her, pervading all his own body, muscles and nerves, making only one heart that grieved with the same sorrow, stirred with the same throbs and lived the same life, like those clocks that are connected at a distance by a thread, and made to keep together second by second.

But she took her hands from her flushed and tear-stained face, and drying her eyes quickly said:

"Come, I should not have spoken to you of this. I am foolish. Let us go back quickly to Madame Honorat and forget. Will you promise me?"

"I promise."

She gave him her hand.

"I have confidence in you. I believe that you are very honorable!"

They turned back. He lifted her to cross the stream as he had lifted up Christiane, last year. Christiane! How many times he had come with her along this path in the days when he adored her. He thought, wondering at the change in his own feelings, "What a short time it lasted, that passionate affection!"

Charlotte touched his arm with her finger, whispering:

"Madame Honorat is fast asleep, let us sit down without making any noise."

Madame Honorat was fast asleep, sure enough. She was sitting with her back against the pine tree, with her handkerchief over her face and her hands folded in her lap. They sat down a few steps away from her and did not speak for fear of waking her.

Then the stillness of the wood was so profound that it grew as painful to them as real suffering. One heard only the water rushing over the stones, a little further down, and then the almost imperceptible stirring of small insects passing through the air. The faint buzzing of flies, or sounds of large insects tipping over the dead leaves.

But where were Louise and Gontran? What were they doing? All at once, they were heard in the distance, far off; they were coming back. Madame Honorat woke and was surprised.

"Why, you're here! I did not hear you coming! And the others, did you find them?"

Paul answered:

"Here they are." And just then they were coming.

They recognized Gontran's laughter. This laughter relieved Charlotte of a weight of anxiety that had oppressed her mind, though she could not have told why.

Soon they came in sight. Gontran was almost running and was pulling Louise, who was blushing furiously, along by the arm. And even before he had reached them he called out, so anxious was he to tell his story:

"You can't think whom we've surprised! I'll give you a thousand guesses. Handsome Dr. Mazelli with the daughter of the illustrious Professor Cloche, as Will would say, the pretty red-haired widow. Oh! yes, truly—surprised—think of it. Surprised. He was kissing her, the rascal. Oh! yes! Oh! yes!"

Madame Honorat, at his unrestrained merriment, made a dignified gesture:

"Oh! Monsieur le Comte—think of these young ladies!"

Gontran made a low bow.

"You are quite right, dear madame, to recall me to the conventionalities. All your ideas are excellent."

Then, to avoid being seen going back together, the young men bowed to the ladies and went home through the woods.

"Well," said Paul.

"Well, I've told her that I adore her and should be delighted to marry her."

"And she said?"

"She said with very graceful discretion: 'That concerns my father. I will give my answer to him.'"

"Then you will——"

"At once charge my ambassador, Andermatt, with the official proposal. And if the old boor makes a fuss, I will make it very warm for him."

And as Andermatt was still talking with Dr. Latonne on the terrace of the casino, Gontran separated them, and at once put his brother-in-law in possession of all the facts of the situation.

Paul walked along on the road to Riom. He needed to be alone, he felt so overcome with that agitation of mind and body which one feels at every meeting with a woman with whom one is about to fall in love.

For some time now he had been influenced, without realizing it, of the keen and fresh charm of this young girl who had been forsaken. He saw that she was so simple-hearted, so upright, and so artless, that he was from the first touched with compassion, with that tender compassion that the sorrow of women always inspires in our hearts. Then, seeing her so often, he had allowed to take root in his heart that grain, that tiny grain of affection that they implant in us so quickly and that grows so large. And now, especially for the past hour, he began to feel in his mind the constant presence of the absent one which is the first sign of love.

He walked along the road, haunted by the memory of her glance, by the sound of her voice, by the lines of her face as she smiled or wept, by the way she walked, even by the color and fluttering of her dress.

And he said to himself: "I believe I am in love. I know myself of old. It's very annoying. Perhaps I had better go back to Paris."

Then he began to think of her as he had thought of Christiane, the year before. That this one, too, was different from all the women that he had known who were born and brought up in cities,

different, too, from the young girls who are surrounded from infancy by the coquetry of their mothers or by that which flaunts itself openly. She had none of the artificiality of the woman who designs to fascinate, nothing studied in her phrases, nothing conventional in her gestures, nothing that was not true in her glance.

Not only was she a young and pure being, but she had sprung from a primitive race. She was a true daughter of the soil, at the moment when she was about to become a woman of the city.

And he extolled her, pleading for her against the vague resistance that he still felt in his heart. Poetic characters of novels passed before his eyes, creations of Walter Scott, of Dickens, or of George Sand, excited still more his imagination that was always haunted by ideals of women.

Gontran described him thus: "Paul is a horse saddled with a Cupid on his back. When he throws him to the ground, another springs up in his place."

But Brétigny saw that night was falling. He had walked a long time. He decided to return to the hotel.

As he passed by the new baths, he found Andermatt and the two Oriols, surveying and measuring the vineyards, and he saw from their gestures that they were discussing it with excitement.

An hour later Will walked into the sitting-room, where the whole family was gathered, and said to the marquis:

"My dear father-in-law, I wish to tell you that your son, Gontran, will marry, in six weeks or two months, Mademoiselle Louise Oriol."

M. de Ravenel was startled.

"Gontran? You say?"

"I say that he will marry, with your consent, in six weeks or more Mademoiselle Oriol, who will be very rich."

Then the marquis said simply:

"*Mon Dieu*, if he likes that, I am perfectly satisfied."

And the banker told of his dealing with the old peasant.

The moment he had been told by the count that the young girl would consent, Andermatt wanted to gain at one interview the vine-dresser's sanction, without giving him time to think up any tricks.

So he hastened to his house, where he found him making out his accounts with great difficulty, on the end of a greasy piece of paper. Colosse aided him and added the numbers on his fingers.

As soon as they were all seated, Andermatt said:

"I would like very much to drink a glass of your good wine."

As soon as tall Jacques had returned bringing the glasses and a brimming jug, Andermatt asked whether Mlle. Louise had come home, then he begged that they would call her. As soon as she stood before him, he rose and with a low bow, said:

"Mademoiselle, will you look upon me at this time as a friend to whom one can confide everything? Yes, you will, I feel sure. I am charged with a very delicate mission in regard to you. My brother-in-law, Count Raoul-Olivier-Gontran de Ravenel, is in love with you, for which I praise him, and he has charged me to ask you before your family, if you would consent to become his wife."

Taken by surprise, too, she cast a troubled glance at her father. Père Oriol wildly looked at his son, his usual counselor, and Colosse stared at Andermatt,

who resumed with a certain degree of pride:

"You understand, mademoiselle, that I have only undertaken this mission with the promise of bringing an immediate answer to my brother-in-law. He is quite aware that he may not please you, and in that case he will leave this place to-morrow, never to return. I know besides that you are sufficiently well acquainted with him, to say to me, who am simply acting for him, 'I consent,' or 'I do not consent.'"

She bowed her head and, blushing, but firm, faltered:

"I consent, monsieur."

Then she ran away so quickly that she struck against the door in passing.

Then Andermatt sat down again, and pouring out a glass of wine for himself, in the peasants' style, he said:

"Now, we will talk business." And without even admitting the possibility of any hesitation, he came to the question of the dowry, fortifying himself with the assurances that the vine-dresser had made to him three weeks before. He estimated Gontran's fortune at three hundred thousand francs, besides expectations, and he let it be understood that if a man like the Count de Ravenel consented to ask for the hand of the Oriol girl, who was a very charming person, it was indisputable that the young girl's family should recognize this honor by a money sacrifice.

Then the peasant, much disconcerted, but flattered, and almost disarmed, tried to defend his property. The discussion was long. A statement of Andermatt had, however, made it easy from the very beginning.

"We do not ask for cash or for checks, only for lands, those that you have already pointed out to me as the dowry of Mademoiselle Louise, and a few additional that I will show you."

The prospect of not having to pay out money, that money slowly amassed, that had come into the house franc by franc, sou by sou, that good money, white or yellow, worn by rubbing against hands, purses, pockets, tables or cafés, deep drawers of old chests, that money whose ring told the stories of so many troubles, worries, fatigues, and of labor, so dear to the heart, the eyes, the fingers of the peasant, held more dear than the cow, the vineyard, the field, that money, often harder to sacrifice than life itself—the thought of not having to see that go with his child, brought at once a great relief, a wish to conciliate, and a secret, suppressed joy to the soul of the father and his son.

Yet they disputed trying to keep a few more acres of ground. They spread out on the table a detailed plan of Mont-Oriol, and they marked one by one, with a cross, the parts given to Louise. It took an hour for Andermatt to capture the last two squares. Then that there might not be any deceit on either side, they walked to the places, taking the plan with them. Then they carefully compared all the plots marked with the crosses and checked them off.

But Andermatt was very uneasy, for he suspected that both the Oriols might deny when next they met part of their concessions, and would want to get back the ends of the vineyards, corners which were well-adapted to his projects, and he tried to find a sure and practical way of making their agreement conclusive.

An idea flashed through his mind that made him smile, then struck him as good though odd.

"If you like," he said, "we will write all this down so as not to forget it later."

And when they returned to the village, he stopped at the tobacconist's to buy two stamped sheets of paper. He knew that the lists of the lands set down on these legal pages, would acquire to the peasants' eyes an almost inviolable character because these pages would represent the law, which is always invisible and threatening, and is upheld by gendarmes, fines and prison.

Then he wrote on one sheet and copied it on the other: "Pursuant to the promise of marriage exchanged between Count Gontran de Ravenel and Mlle. Louise Oriol, M. Oriol, the father, assigns as a dowry to his daughter the lands designated below——" And he enumerated them carefully, with the numbers of the register of lands of the district.

And when he had dated and signed it, he made Père Oriol sign it, too, who in his turn stipulated that the amount of the fiancé's fortune should be written down. Then he went to the hotel with the paper in his pocket.

Everyone laughed at his tale and Gontran more than all the rest.

Then the marquis said to his son with an air of great dignity:

"We will go this evening, both of us, to call on this family, and I will myself renew the request first presented by my son-in-law, so that the affair may be more regular."

CHAPTER V

A DOUBLE BETROTHAL

GONTRAN was a model fiancé. He gave presents, with money from Andermatt's purse, and he went all the time to see the young girl, either at her own home or at Madame Honorat's. Paul now nearly always went with him, to meet Charlotte, whom he decided after every visit he would never see again.

She had bravely resigned herself to her sister's marriage and she even spoke of it freely, without seeming to keep the least regret in her heart. Only her nature seemed a little changed, more serious, less frank. Brétigny, while Gontran was talking love to Louise in a low voice in a corner, permitted his heart to be flooded by this new love as by a rising tide. He realized it and he gave himself up to it, thinking: "Bah! when the time comes, I will run away, that's all." When he had left her, he would go to see Christiane, who now reclined in an easy-chair from morning till night. The moment that he passed the threshold, he felt nervous, irritated, prepared for all the little quarrels that arise from weariness. Everything she said, everything she thought, vexed him even before she had said it. Her look of suffering, her resignation,

her glances of reproach and supplication caused angry words to rise to his lips, that he restrained himself from saying through good breeding, and when he was in her presence he always saw before him the vision that was constantly with him of the young girl whom he had just left.

When Christiane, grieved at seeing so little of him, overwhelmed him with questions as to how he spent his days, he made up stories to which she listened attentively, trying to discover if he was not thinking of some other woman.

There was only one subject on which he could now talk calmly with her. It was the approaching marriage of Gontran which gave him a chance to say Charlotte's name and to think aloud of the young girl. And he even experienced a strange, confused, inexplicable pleasure in hearing Christiane pronounce this name, and in hearing her praise the kindness and all the fine qualities of this girl, and in the pity she expressed for her, regretting that her brother had sacrificed her, and wishing that some man, some brave heart, would understand her, love her and marry her.

He said:

"Oh! yes, Gontran made a foolish mistake there. She is altogether charming, that little girl."

Christiane with no misgiving would repeat:

"Simply charming. She is a pearl! a piece of perfection!"

She never dreamt that a man like Paul could love a young girl and that some day he would marry. She only feared intrigues.

And from some strange feeling of sentiment, the praise of Charlotte from Christiane's lips assumed for him a great value, roused his love, urged on his desire, and surrounded the young girl with an irresistible attraction.

One day as he was going with Gontran into Madame Honorat's to meet the Oriol girls there, they found Dr. Mazelli installed there and very much at home.

He stretched out his hands in welcome to the young men, with his warm, Italian smile that seemed to give his whole heart with every word and gesture.

Gontran and he had formed a familiar and idle friendship based on like affinities, hidden resemblances, on a sort of federation of instincts, much more than on true affection and confidence.

Then they fell into conversation. The handsome doctor put himself out a great deal for the young ladies, especially for Charlotte. He showed, in speaking to women constant adoration in his voice, his gestures, and his glance. His entire person from head to foot, said to them: "I love you!" with an eloquence of mien that invariably won them.

He had the graces of an actress, the light pirouettes of a ballet girl, the supple movements of a juggler, a whole science of natural and acquired fascination which he employed constantly.

Paul said suddenly, as he was returning with Gontran to the hotel:

"Why does that charlatan go to that house?"

The count answered calmly:

"Does one ever know with these adventurers? They are the kind of people who creep in everywhere. That fellow is probably tired of his wandering life, and of obeying the whims of his Spanish lady, whose valet he is rather than

physician. He is hunting round. Professor Cloche's daughter was a good catch, but he has missed her, he says. The second Oriol girl would not be worth any less to him. He is trying, feeling about, smelling around, sounding. He would become part owner of the springs, would try to overthrow that imbecile Latonne, or in any event would establish here every summer an excellent practice that would continue through the winter—*parbleu!* that's his plan; come, there's no doubt of it."

A dull rage, a jealous hatred awoke in Paul's heart.

A voice shouted, "Hey! Hey!" It was Mazelli who rejoined them.

Brétigny said to him with aggressive irony:

"Where are you running so fast, doctor? One would think that you were in pursuit of fortune."

The Italian smiled without stopping, but springing back a little he plunged, with the graceful movements of a mimic, both his hands into his pockets, turned them inside out, and showed that they were both empty, holding them out between his fingers by the edges of the seams. Then he said: "I haven't caught her yet."

And pivoting elegantly round on his toes, he rushed off like a man who is in a great hurry.

During the succeeding days he went again several times to Dr. Honorat's where he made himself useful to the three ladies by a thousand graceful little services, by the same tactful manners that he used no doubt towards the duchess. He could make everything to perfection, from compliments to a dish of macaroni. He was, besides an excellent cook, and kept free from spots by a blue servant's apron, and decked out in a chef's cap made of paper, and singing, in Italian, Neapolitan songs, he cooked with great dash without making himself appear ridiculous at all, but amused and charmed everyone down to the half-crazy maid who said: "He is a saint!"

His projects soon were clear and Paul doubted no longer that he was trying to win Charlotte's love.

He seemed to succeed. He was such a flatterer, so eager, so skilled in pleasing, that the young girl's face, when she saw him, expressed that contentment that shows the heart is glad.

Paul on his side, without being wholly conscious of it, assumed a lover's attitude and posed as a rival. As soon as he saw the doctor with Charlotte, he drew near, and in his more direct way, strove to gain the young girl's affection. He displayed a frank, brotherly, devoted affection that said to her with such sincere familiarity and so frankly that one could hardly think it an avowal of love: "Oh! come now, I am very fond of you!"

Mazelli, surprised at this unexpected rivalry, used all his charms, and when Brétigny—who was gnawed with jealousy, the unconscious jealousy that fills a man in the presence of every woman, even if he does not love her but only likes her, and who was naturally violent—grew aggressive and haughty, the other, who was more pliant, always master of himself, answered with shrewdness, wit, and clever and mocking compliments.

It was a daily battle waged by both, without either, perhaps, having any well-defined plans.

Charlotte had resumed her bright

spirits, but she showed a sharper kind of mischief, with something enigmatical, less sincere in her smile and glance. One would say that Gontran's desertion had taught her a lesson, prepared her for possible deceptions, made her alert and armed.

She manœuvred with her two lovers in a quick and clever way, saying whatever was fitting to each, without ever opposing one against the other, without letting one suppose that she preferred the other, laughing a little at this one before that one, and at that one before this one, giving each fair play without even seeming to take either seriously. But all this was done simply, like a school-girl and not like a coquette, with that mischievous air of young girls that sometimes makes them irresistible.

Yet Mazelli seemed suddenly to get the advantage. He seemed to have grown more intimate with her as if some secret understanding had been reached between them. As he chatted to her, he toyed with her parasol and the ribbon of her dress, which seemed to Paul an act of moral possession, and exasperated him so that he longed to box the Italian's ears.

But one day at Père Oriol's house, when Brétigny was talking with Louise and Gontran, but had his eye all the time on Mazelli who was telling Charlotte things in a low voice that made her laugh, he saw her blush and look so troubled that he did not doubt for a second that the other had spoken of love. She cast down her eyes, smiled no more, but listened attentively, and Paul, who felt on the verge of making an outburst, said to Gontran:

"Will you be so kind as to go out for five minutes with me?"

The count excused himself to his fiancée and followed his friend.

As soon as they were on the road, Paul said:

"My dear fellow, at any cost we must prevent that miserable Italian from beguiling this poor girl who is defenseless against him."

"But what do you want me to do?"

"To warn her that he is an adventurer."

"Ha! my dear fellow, those matters don't concern me."

"After all, she will be your sister-in-law."

"Yes, but there is nothing that assures me positively that Mazelli has any wrong designs towards her. He is very attentive in just the same way to all women, and he has never done or said anything unsuitable."

"Well, if you won't take charge of it, I will attend to it myself, although it certainly concerns me less than it does you."

"So then you are in love with Charlotte?"

"I?—no—but I see clearly through this fellow's game."

"My dear friend, you are mixing yourself up in very delicate matters—and—unless you are in love with Charlotte?"

"No—I am not in love with her—but I am hunting down impostors, that's all."

"May I ask what you are planning to do?"

"To slap this fraud in the face."

"Why, the best way to make her fall in love with him. You fight, and whether he wounds you, or you wound

him, he will become a hero in her eyes."

"Then what would you do?"

"In your place?"

"In my place."

"I would speak to the girl as a friend. She has great confidence in you. Well, I would tell her simply in a few words, what these parasites of society are. You know very well how to say these things. You have eloquence. And I would make her understand—first, why he is a follower of the Spanish lady; second, why he laid siege to Professor Cloche's daughter; and third, why, not having succeeded with that attempt, he is striving as a last resort to win Mlle. Charlotte Oriol."

"Why don't you do that, yourself, who will be her brother-in-law?"

"Because—because—because of what has passed between us—you see—I cannot——"

"That's true. I will speak to her."

"Do you want me to arrange a tête-à-tête for you right away?"

"Yes, at once!"

"All right, take a ten minute walk while I carry off Louise and Mazelli, and you will find the other girl all alone when you return."

Paul Brétigny strolled along the banks of the gorge of Enval and thought how he would commence this difficult conversation.

He found Charlotte Oriol alone in the cold, whitewashed parlor of her father's house, and he said to her as he sat down near her:

"It was I, mademoiselle, who asked Gontran to secure this interview with you."

She looked up at him with her clear eyes.

"Why, what for?"

"Oh! it isn't to pay you insipid compliments in the Italian fashion, it is to talk to you as a friend, a very devoted friend who owes you advice."

"Tell me what it is."

He treated the subject in an impersonal way, relying on his own experience and hers to lead up gently to discreet but unmistakable phrases in regard to adventurers who seek their fortunes everywhere, making use with their professional adroitness of all simple-hearted and good people, men or women whose purses and hearts they explore.

She had grown a little pale and listened intently.

She asked:

"I understand and I don't understand. You are speaking of someone, of whom?"

"I am speaking of Dr. Mazelli."

At that she looked down, and for several moments made no reply, then she said in a voice that faltered:

"You are so frank that I will be the same. Since—since—since my sister's engagement, I have become a little—a little less stupid! And so I had already suspected what you have just been telling me—and I laughed in my sleeve at his coming here."

She had raised her face, and in her smile, in her arch glance, in her little *retroussé* nose, in the moist, shining gleam of her teeth showing between her lips, so much true gracefulness, light-hearted mischief, and charming frolicsome ways were revealed that Brétigny felt himself drawn towards her by some of those tumultuous transports that threw him, wild with rapture, at the feet of his latest love. And his heart bounded with joy because Mazelli was

not the favored one. He then, he had triumphed, himself!

He asked:

"So you don't love him, then?"

"Who, Mazelli?"

"Yes."

She looked at him with eyes so full of disappointment that his presence of mind was all upset, he faltered in a supplicating voice:

"Oh—don't you love—anyone?"

She answered with downcast eyes:

"I don't know—I love those who love me."

He suddenly caught up both the young girl's hands, and kissed them wildly. Then in one of those moments of impulses when the mind is maddened, when the words that fall from one's lips come rather from the excited body than from the wandering mind, he faltered:

"I love you, my little Charlotte, I myself, I love you!"

She quickly freed one of her little hands, laid it over his lips, and whispered:

"Say no more—I entreat you, say no more! That would cause me too much sorrow if it were still another falsehood."

She stood up, he rose, caught her in his arms, and embraced her with transports of affection.

A sudden noise parted them. Père Oriol had just come in and he was staring at them with startled eyes. Then he cried:

"Ah, *bougrrre!* ah, *bougrrre!* ah, *bougrrre!*—of a savage!"

Charlotte had fled, and the two men stood facing one another.

Paul, after some moments of distress, tried to explain himself.

"*Mon Dieu*—monsieur—I have behaved—it is true—like a——"

But the old man did not listen. Rage, a furious rage possessed him and he advanced towards Brétigny, with clenched fists, repeating:

"Ah! *bougrrre* of a savage!"

Then when they were face to face, he seized him by the collar with both his knotted peasant's hands. But the other who was as large and strong with the superior skill that practice in athletic sports gives, freed himself from the peasant's grip with a single push and, holding him firmly against the wall, said:

"Listen, Père Oriol, it's not a time for us to fight, but to have an understanding. I did embrace your daughter, it's true—I swear to you that it was the first time—and I swear to you, too, that I wish to marry her."

The old man whose physical violence had abated after the encounter with his adversary, but whose rage was not calmed, stammered:

"Ah! that's it! You want to steal my daughter, you want her money. *Bougrrre* of a deceiver!"

Then all that was in his heart escaped from him in many broken words. He could not console himself for the loss of the dowry promised to the elder, for his vineyards that would fall into the hands of these Parisians. He suspected now Gontran's need of money, Andermatt's shrewdness, and quite forgetting the unlooked for fortune that the banker had brought him, he poured out his venom and secret rancor on those evil-doers who no longer let him sleep in peace.

One would have thought that Andermatt, his family and friends came every

night to rifle his house and to steal something from him, his lands, his springs, and his daughters.

And he hurled his reproaches in Paul's face, accusing him also of having designs on his property, of being a swindler, and of taking Charlotte so as to get his lands.

The other, who soon grew impatient, shouted in his face:

"But I am richer than you, doggone it, you old donkey. I would be giving money to you."

The old man paused, incredulous, but attentive, and then in an appeased tone of voice he recommenced his accusations.

Paul now replied and explained his position. And believing that he was bound by the surprise for which he alone was responsible he proposed to marry her without asking any dowry whatever.

Père Oriol shook his head, made him repeat, but could not understand it. To him Paul was still a fellow without a cent in the world, a miserable pauper.

And when Brétigny, exasperated, threw in his face the words:

"But I have more than a hundred and twenty thousand francs of income, you old idiot. Do you understand?—three millions!"

Suddenly the other asked:

"Would you write that down on a piece of paper?"

"Why, yes, I will write it down!"

"And will you sign it?"

"Certainly, I will sign it."

"On a sheet of notary's paper?"

"Why, yes, on a sheet of notary's paper!"

Then he rose, and opening his chest of drawers, drew out two sheets stamped with the seal of the State. Then he looked up the contract which Andermatt had required from him some days before, and drew up an odd promise of marriage, on condition that three millions should be vouched for by the fiancé. To this Brétigny had to affix his signature.

When Paul got out of doors again, it seemed to him as if the world were no longer turning in the same direction. So then he was engaged, in spite of himself, in spite of her, by one of those chances, one of those tricks of circumstances, which close on you every way of escape. He muttered: "What a piece of folly!" Then he thought: "Bah! Perhaps I could not have found anyone better in the whole world." And in the bottom of his heart he felt happy at this snare of fate.

CHAPTER VI

STARTLING DEVELOPMENTS

The morning of the day following began badly for Andermatt. As he arrived at the bathing establishment, he learned that M. Aubry-Pasteur had died during the night of an attack of apoplexy, at the Grand Hotel. Besides the

fact that the engineer had been very useful to him because of his scientific knowledge, his eager interest, and the affection that he had for the Mont-Oriol resort, which he considered almost as his daughter, it was very much to be regretted that an invalid who had come to fight against the tendency to congestion should have died of that very cause, while undergoing treatment, at the height of the season.

The banker, greatly agitated, walked back and forth in the absent inspector's office, thinking up ways in which another cause could be found for this calamity, imagining some accident that might have happened, a fall, the rupture of an aneurism, and he waited impatiently the arrival of Dr. Latonne so that the death could be skillfully certified to in such a way that no doubt might arise as to the predisposing cause of the fatal accident.

The medical inspector came in suddenly with a pale face, and as he entered he asked:

"Do you know the deplorable news!"

"Yes, the death of M. Aubry-Pasteur."

"No, no, the flight of Dr. Mazelli with Professor Cloche's daughter."

Andermatt felt a cold chill run over him.

"What? You say——"

"Oh! my dear sir, it's a dreadful catastrophe, a crushing blow."

He sat down and wiped his brow, then he told the facts as he had them from Petrus Martel who had gleaned them directly from the professor's valet.

This Mazelli had ardently courted the pretty red-haired widow, who was a coarse coquette, whose first husband had died of consumption. But M. Cloche who had winnowed out the schemes of the Italian doctor, and did not wish to have this adventurer as his second son-in-law, kicked him out-of-doors when he found him on his knees before his daughter.

Mazelli, who had gone out of the door, soon came back through the window by the silken ladder of lovers. There were two versions current. According to the first, he had made the professor's daughter mad with love and jealousy. According to the second, he had continued to see her secretly, while seeming to be devoting himself to another woman. Then, learning at length through his sweetheart that the professor would remain inflexible, he had carried her off that very night, by this scandal making a marriage inevitable.

Dr. Latonne rose and leaning against the mantel while Andermatt, cast down, continued walking back and forth, he exclaimed:

"For a doctor, monsieur, a doctor, to do such a thing! a doctor of medicine! what a lack of principle!"

Andermatt disconsolately reckoned up the consequences, grouping and weighing them as in an arithmetical calculation. They were:

First, the unfortunate report that was spreading through the neighboring hot springs resorts as far as Paris. However, by manipulating it right, this elopement might serve as an advertisement. A fortnight's news echoes well-worded in large print in the newspapers would draw attention strongly to Mont-Oriol.

Secondly, the departure of Professor Cloche, an irreparable loss.

Thirdly, the departure of the Duchesse and the Duc de Ramas-Aldaverra,

a second inevitable loss, without possible compensation.

Summing it up, Dr. Latonne was right. It was a frightful catastrophe.

Then the banker, turning to the doctor, said:

"You must go at once to the Grand Hotel and draw up a certificate of death of Aubry-Pasteur, in such a way that no one will suspect a congestion."

The doctor took up his hat again, then, as he was going, he said:

"Ah! still another piece of news that is going the rounds. Is it true that your friend, Paul Brétigny, is going to marrry Charlotte Oriol?"

Andermatt started with surprise.

"Brétigny? Oh, come! who told you that?"

"Why, as usual, Petrus Martel, who got it from Père Oriol himself."

"From Père Oriol?"

"Yes, from Père Oriol, who affirms that his future son-in-law is worth three million."

William did not know then what to think. He murmured:

"Well, it's possible, he has been rather taken with her for some time past! Why, then—the whole knoll is ours—the whole knoll! Oh, I must find out at once if it is true!"

And he followed the doctor out of the office so as to see Paul before lunch.

As he went into the hotel, he was told that his wife had asked for him several times. He found her still in bed, talking with her father and her brother, the latter glancing quickly over the newspapers with a distracted air.

She felt miserable, very miserable and restless. She was anxious without knowing why. Then a growing anxiety assailed her. She wished to consult Dr. Black. As a result of hearing jokes around her about Dr. Latonne, she had lost all confidence in him and she wanted other advice, she wanted Dr. Black's whose success was constantly increasing. Fears, all the haunting fears that torture women, besieged her from morning till night. After a terrible dream, in which it seemed necessary that an operation should be performed, she was constantly haunted by thoughts of the most horrible details. Then she felt that Dr. Black, alone, could tell her the truth about her condition, and she wanted him immediately, she insisted that he should make an examination instantly, instantly, instantly!

Andermatt, greatly troubled, did not know what to answer.

"But, my dear child, it's very difficult to arrange, considering my relations with Latonne. It is—even—impossible. Listen, I have an idea. I will go for Professor Mas-Roussel who stands a hundred times higher than Black. He won't refuse to come."

But she insisted. She wanted to see Black, no one but he. She needed to see him, to see his big bulldog head near her. It was a longing, a wild, superstitious longing. She must have him.

Then William tried to change the current of her thoughts.

"You don't know that that intriguing Mazelli eloped last night with Professor Cloche's daughter? They have vanished, gone off no one knows where. Here's a fine story!"

She raised herself on her pillow, her eyes wide with pity, and she faltered:

"Oh! the poor duchess—the poor woman, how I pity her."

For some time past her heart had sympathized with this bruised and pas-

sionate soul! She suffered the same grief and shed the same tears.

But she resumed:

"Listen, Will, bring Monsieur Black to me. I feel that I shall die unless he comes!"

Andermatt took her hand, and kissing her tenderly, said:

"Look, my little Christiane, be reasonable—try to understand."

He saw the tears in her eyes, then he turned to the marquis.

"You are the one who must do this, my dear father-in-law. I cannot do it. Black comes here every day about one o'clock to see the Princess of Maldebourg. Stop him in the hallway and have him come to your daughter's room. You can wait for an hour, can't you, Christiane?"

She agreed to wait an hour, but refused to lunch with the gentlemen, who went alone to the dining-room.

Paul was there already. Andermatt exclaimed the moment that he saw him:

"Ah! come, what's this they've just been telling me? Are you going to marry Charlotte Oriol? It isn't true, is it?"

The young man answered in a low voice, with an anxious glance towards the closed door:

"*Mon Dieu,* yes!"

As none of the others had known this before, all three stood in amazement, staring at him.

William asked:

"What's got into you? You to marry, with your fortune? You to bind yourself to one woman, when you can court them all? And then the family is not all that might be asked for as regards social position. It's all right for Gontran, who hasn't a cent!"

Brétigny burst out laughing.

"My father made his fortune in flour, he was a miller—a wholesale miller. If you had known him, you might also have said that he lacked cultivation. As to the young girl——"

Andermatt interrupted:

"Oh! perfectly charming—lovely—and—you know—she will be as rich as you—if not richer—I'll answer for that, I'll answer for that!"

Gontran muttered:

"Yes, this marriage will interfere with nothing, and it makes up for my defection. Only he should have warned us it was coming. How in the world did the affair come about, my dear fellow?"

Then Paul told the whole story, with a few embellishments. He told of his doubts, which he enlarged on, and of his sudden decision when a word from the young girl had revealed to him that she loved him. He told of Père Oriol's unlooked for entrance into the room, of their quarrel, which he exaggerated, the peasant's doubts in regard to Paul's fortune, and of the officially stamped paper that he had taken from the chest.

Andermatt, laughing till the tears came, struck the table with his fist.

"Ah! he copied that, the scheme of the official paper. That's my invention, that trick."

Then Paul faltered, blushing a little:

"I must beg you not to tell this news yet to your wife. In consideration of our friendship, it would be more suitable for me to tell her myself."

Gontran looked at his friend with an odd yet kindly smile, that seemed to say: "This is all right, coming out all right, perfectly right. That is the way such affairs should end, without scandal, without gossip, without tragedies."

He suggested:

"If you like, Paul, old fellow, we will go up together after lunch, when she will be sitting up, and you can tell her of your decision."

Their eyes met, looked steadily at one another, filled with unfathomable thoughts, then glanced away.

And Paul replied with an air of indifference:

"Yes, gladly, we will talk it over later."

A servant from the hotel came in to say that Dr. Black had just arrived to call on the princess, and the marquis went out to catch him in the hall.

He explained the situation to the doctor, the embarrassing position in which his son-in-law was placed, and his daughter's wish. Then he carried him off without resistance.

As soon as the little man with the big head entered the room Christiane said:

"Leave us, papa."

And the marquis withdrew. Then she told the doctor all her anxieties, all her fears, her nightmares, in a low, sweet voice, as if she were making a confession. And the doctor listened as a priest might, looking at her from time to time with his great round eyes, showing his attention by a little nod of his head, murmuring: "That's it," as much as to say: "I have your case at my finger-ends and I can cure you whenever I wish."

When she had finished talking, he began in his turn to ask her very detailed questions as to her life, her habits, her diet, and her treatment. Sometimes he appeared to approve with a gesture, sometimes to censure with an "Oh!" full of reserve.

He took a leaf of paper from the table and wrote a long prescription. It was long, very long. Then he came to her bedside, and in a different tone of voice, so as to show clearly that he had finished his sacred professional duty, he began to chat with her.

He had a deep, oily voice, the powerful voice of a dwarf, and questions were concealed in the most commonplace remarks. He talked on all subjects. Gontran's engagement seemed to interest him greatly. Then, with his hideous smile, he said:

"I have told you nothing of Monsieur Brétigny's engagement, although it is no longer a secret, for Père Oriol tells it to everyone."

She felt a faintness that commenced at her finger tips and spread over her whole body. She had not quite grasped the news, yet a dreadful fear of not learning the truth made her suddenly cautious, and she faltered:

"Ah! Père Oriol tells it to everyone?"

"Yes, indeed. He talked to me myself about it not ten minutes ago. It seems that Monsieur Brétigny is very rich and that he has loved little Charlotte for a long time. It was, however, Madame Honorat who brought about these two engagements. She devoted her time and her house to the meetings of the young people."

Christiane had closed her eyes. She was unconscious.

At the doctor's call, a chambermaid rushed in, then the marquis, Andermatt, and Gontran, who went for vinegar, ether, ice, and twenty different things, all equally useless.

Suddenly the young woman stirred, opened her eyes, raised her arms, and uttered a piercing cry as she writhed

in bed. She tried to speak, faltering:

"Oh! how I suffer—*mon Dieu*—how I suffer! What agony—oh! *mon Dieu.*" And she commenced to scream again.

Andermatt rushed for Dr. Latonne, whom he found finishing his lunch.

"Come quickly—my wife is taken suddenly ill—hurry."

Then he thought of a way to explain how Dr. Black had been found in the hotel when she was first taken.

Dr. Black himself confirmed this untruth to his colleague; he said:

"I was just going in to see the princess, when I was told that Madame Andermatt was ill. I hastened to her. It was time!"

But William, greatly affected, his heart beating fast and his mind full of anxiety, was seized with sudden doubts as to the skill of the two men. So he rushed out again, bare-headed. to call on Professor Mas-Roussel and beg him to come. The professor at once consented, buttoned up his frock coat with the mechanical manner of a physician starting out on his rounds, and strode off hurriedly with the long, eager strides of an eminent man whose presence may save a life.

The moment he entered, the two others, full of deference, asked his advice with respect, saying in chorus or nearly at the same time: "This is what has occurred, dear master—don't you think, dear master?—isn't it likely, dear master?"

Suddenly the door was pushed open. Her husband entered on tip-toe. When he saw that her eyes were open, he went up to her:

"Are you better?"

"Yes, thank you."

"You have given us a great deal of anxiety since yesterday. But now the danger is over and we have a lovely little daughter. I telegraphed to our friend, Madame Icardon, begging her to come and be with you, but she is with her nephew who has scarlet fever. But you mustn't be left with no one near you, without a woman who is somewhat congenial. And a lady here has offered to take care of you and bear you company every day, and, *ma foi!* I have accepted her offer. It is Madame Honorat."

Chrstiane suddenly remembered what Dr. Black had said. She shrank back and moaned:

"Oh! no, no—not she—not she!"

William did not understand, and resumed:

"Now, listen, I know that she is very ordinary, but your brother likes her very much, and she has been very helpful to him. Then, too, they say that she was formerly a nurse whom Honorat met while she was caring for an invalid. If you don't like her I will get her to leave the next day. Let us try her at least. Let her come once or twice."

She lay still, thinking. Such a fierce longing to know the truth, to know the entire truth, filled her mind, that the hope of getting this woman to chatter, so that she might snatch from her one by one the words that would rend her heart, made her now feel like answering:

"Go—go and find her at once—at once. Go quickly!"

And to this irresistible desire to know the truth was added a strange wish to suffer more, to roll as it were on the thorns of her misery—the strange, mor-

bid desire of the martyr who in his ecstasy welcomes pain.

Then she faltered:

"Yes, I am quite willing, bring Madame Honorat to me."

Then all at once she felt that she could not wait a moment longer without being sure, perfectly sure, and she asked William in a voice that was faint as a breath:

"Is it true that Monsieur Brétigny is going to be married?"

He replied calmly:

"Yes, it's true. We would have told you before if we could have spoken to you."

She went on:

"To Charlotte?"

"To Charlotte."

But William now had a fixed idea, too, that never left him again: his daughter, hardly yet alive, but whom he went to look at every instant. He was indignant that Christiane's first words had not been to ask for the baby, and in a tone of gentle reproach he said:

"Why, come, you haven't asked yet for the little one. Do you know that she is getting on very nicely?"

She shuddered as if he had touched an open wound, but she must pass through all the stations of this Calvary.

"Bring her to me," she said.

He disappeared at the foot of the bed behind the curtain, then he came back with his face all lighted up with pride and happiness, and held in his hands, in an awkward way, a bundle of white linen.

He placed it on the embroidered pillow, close to Christiane's head. She was choking with emotion, as he said:

"Look, see how beautiful she is!"

She looked.

He drew back with two fingers the soft laces that veiled the little red face, so tiny, so red, with closed eyes, and mouth slightly stirring.

And she thought as she bent over this beginning of a human life: "It is my daughter. This — this — this — is my daughter!"

Her repulsion for this child whose birth had so cruelly torn her poor heart and tender body with anguish suddenly disappeared. She now looked at it with burning and painful curiosity, with profound astonishment, the astonishment of an animal that looks at its first-born.

Andermatt was expecting that she would kiss it passionately. He was again surprised and shocked and asked:

"Aren't you going to kiss it?"

She leaned very gently towards the little red forehead, and in proportion as her lips approached she felt them drawn, called by the child. And when she had placed them on the child's forehead, and felt the moist warmth, the warmth of her own life, it seemed as if she could never take her lips away from that baby's soft flesh and that they would stay there forever.

Something brushed against her cheek. It was her husband's beard, as he leaned down to kiss her. And now he wanted in his turn to kiss his daughter, and with his outstretched mouth he gave it very soft little pecks on its nose.

Christiane, her heart shrinking at this caress, looked at them beside her, her daughter and him—and him!

Soon he wanted to carry the baby back to its cradle.

"No," she said. "Leave it a few min-

utes longer, that I may feel it near my face. Don't talk any more, don't move about, leave us and wait."

She passed her hand over the little body hidden in wrappings, laid her forehead close to the small grinning face, closed her eyes, and lay still without thinking of anything.

But William, at the close of a few minutes, touched her shoulder softly: "Come, my darling, you must be reasonable; no emotion, you know, no emotion!"

Then he carried off their daughter, whom the mother followed with her eyes until she vanished behind the curtain of the bed.

After he came back, he said:

"Then it's understood that I am to send Madame Honorat to-morrow morning to keep you company."

She answered in a firm voice:

"Yes, my dear, you may send her to me to-morrow morning."

She stretched herself out in bed, exhausted, worn out—but perhaps a little less unhappy.

Her father and her brother came in the evening to see her and told her all the news of the place: the sudden departure of Professor Cloche in search of his daughter, the guesses as to the whereabouts of the Duchess of Ramas, whom no one had seen since, and who was supposed to have also gone in search of Mazelli. Gontran laughed over these adventures and drew an amusing moral from the events.

"These hot springs resorts," he said, pass belief. They are the only fairylands that exist in the world! In two months more things happen there than in the rest of the universe during the remainder of the year. One might truly say that the springs are not mineralized but bewitched. And it is the same thing everywhere, at Aix, Royat, Vichy, Luchon, and at the sea-bathing resorts, too, at Dieppe, Étretat, Trouville, Biarritz, Cannes and Nice. One meets there samples of people of all classes of society, a mixture of races and people that could be found nowhere else, and marvellous adventures. The women are quick and delightfully ready for a flirtation. In Paris one resists, at the springs one falls! Some men make fortunes there like Andermatt, others find death, like Aubry-Pasteur, still others meet with worse than that—and get married—like me—and like Paul. Isn't that a stupid and funny thing to do? You know about Paul's engagement, don't you?"

She murmured:

"Yes, William told me about it a little while ago."

Gontran went on:

"He is right, perfectly right. She is a peasant's daughter. Well, what of that? She is worth more than the daughter of adventurers, or than an adventuress pure and simple. I know Paul. He would have ended by marrying an adventuress if she had resisted him for six weeks. And to have resisted him would have taken either a jade or an innocent. He has happened on the innocent. So much the better for him."

Christiane listened, and every word that entered her ears sank into her heart, and hurt her, hurt her cruelly.

She closed her eyes and said:

"I am very tired. I would like to rest a little."

They kissed her and went out.

She could not sleep, her mind was so disturbed, so active and tortured. Thi

idea that he did not love her any more, not any more at all, became so unbearable to her, that if she had not seen the woman, the nurse, who was drowsing in an arm-chair, she would have risen, opened her window and thrown herself down on the steps of the hotel. A tiny ray of moonlight came through an opening in her curtains and made a little, round, bright patch on the floor. She saw it, and all these memories assailed her together: the lake, the wood, the first "I love you," scarcely heard, it was so thrilling, and Tournoël, and all their caresses, in the evening, on the shadowy ways, and the road to La Roche-Pradière. Suddenly she saw that white road, on a star-lit night, and he, Paul, with his arm round a woman's waist and kissing her lips at every step. She recognized her. It was Charlotte! He drew her close to him, smiling as he knew how to smile, whispered in her ear the words, so sweet that he knew how to say, then he threw himself on his knees and kissed the ground before her as he had kissed it before Christiane! This was so hard, so hard for her to bear that, turning and hiding her face in her pillow, she commenced to sob. She almost shrieked, so cruelly did this despair torture her soul.

Each beat of her heart, that leaped to her throat, that surged to her temples, flung to her this word: "Paul—Paul—Paul," in endless repetition. She stopped her ears with her hands so that she might hear it no longer, buried her head under the covers, but the name rang out then in the depths of her breast with every beat of her heart that could not be appeased.

The nurse was awakened, and asked her:

"Are you worse, madame?"

Christiane turned around, her face stained with tears, and murmured:

"No, I was sleeping, I was dreaming —I was frightened."

Then she begged her to light two candles so that she could not see the ray of moonlight.

Yet towards morning she fell asleep.

She had slept several hours when Andermatt came in, bringing with him Madame Honorat. The fat lady, who made herself at home at once, sat down by the bedside, took the invalid's hands, questioned her as a doctor might, then, satisfied with her replies, she said: "Come, come, that's all right." Then she took off her hat, her gloves and shawl, and turning to the nurse, said:

"You can go now, my girl. Come when we ring for you."

Christiane, who at once felt a dislike for this woman, said to her husband:

"Give me my daughter for a little while."

As on the day before, William brought the baby, kissing it tenderly, and laid it on the pillow. And as on the day before, when she had felt the warmth of the little strange body through its wrappings, against her cheek, now also was suddenly pervaded by a sense of calm.

Suddenly the little one began to cry in a shrill and piercing tone. "She is hungry," said Andermatt. He rang, and the wet-nurse came in. She was an enormous red-faced woman, with the mouth of an ogress, full of large shining teeth that almost frightened Christiane, who felt a longing to snatch back

the baby.

Madame Honorat meanwhile gave instructions to the wet-nurse, who went out of the room, taking the baby with her.

Andermatt went out in his turn and the two women were left alone.

Christiane did not know how to speak of what was torturing her soul. She was afraid of showing too much agitation, of losing her head, of weeping, of betraying herself. But Madame Honorat began to gossip of her own accord without being asked any questions. When she had told about all the scandals that were going the rounds of the place, she came to the Oriol family.

"They are good people," she said, "very good people. If you had known the mother, what a true, brave woman she was! She was worth ten, madame. The girls take after her, too."

Then, as she was broaching another subject, Christiane said:

"Which of the two do you like best, Louise or Charlotte?"

"Oh, I, madame, I like Louise best, your brother's choice. She is more judicious, more steady. She is a sensible woman! But my husband likes the other best. The men, you know, have their tastes, which are not like ours."

She was silent. Christiane, whose courage was weakening, faltered:

"My brother often met his fiancée at your house."

"Oh! yes, madame, I should think so, every day. Everything was arranged at my house, everything! For my part, I let them talk together, these children, I understood it all, perfectly! But what gave me pleasure, really, was when I saw that M. Paul was considering the younger one."

Then Christiane, in a voice that could hardly be heard, murmured:

"Does he love her devotedly?"

"Ah! madame, does he love her! He had lost his head over her lately. Then when the Italian, the one who took Professor Cloche's daughter, was hanging around the girl a little, it was as good as a play. I thought they would fight. Ah! if you had seen Monsieur Paul's eyes! And he looked at her as though she herself were a holy Virgin. It's a happiness to see love like that!"

Then Christiane asked her questions about everything that had happened in her presence, what they had said, what they had done, about their walks in the valley of Sans-Souci—where he had so often told her of his love. She asked unexpected questions that surprised the fat lady, about things that no one would have thought of, for she was constantly comparing, recalling a thousand details of the past year, all Paul's refined courtesies, his thoughtfulness, his ingenious inventions to please her, all the display of charming attentions and tender care that shows a man's imperious desire to fascinate. And she wanted to know if he had done all this for the other woman, if he had recommenced this siege of a heart with the same ardor, the same enthusiasm, and the same irresistible passion.

And every time that she recognized a little act, a little trait of his, one of those pretty nothings, one of those thrilling surprises that cause a throbbing of the heart, and of which Paul was so prodigal when he was in love, Christiane, lying on her bed, uttered a low "Ah!" of pain.

Madame Honorat, astonished at this

odd exclamation, declared more emphatically:

"Why, yes. It is as I tell you, just as I tell you. I never saw a man so much in love as he."

"Does he recite poetry to her?"

"Indeed he does, madame, and very pretty poetry, too."

And when they both were silent, one heard only the low, monotonous lullaby of the nurse as she rocked the child to sleep in the next room.

Steps approached in the hall, and MM. Mas-Roussel and Latonne were coming to see their patient. They found her excited and not quite so well as on the day before.

When they had gone, Andermatt opened the door again, and said, without coming in:

"It's Dr. Black, who wants to see you. Will you see him?"

She raised herself up in bed and cried:

"No—no—I do not want to—no!"

William came in, amazed:

"Why, but listen—it is right—we owe it to him—you should."

Her eyes were so widely open and her lips trembled so that she looked as if she had lost her reason. She cried again in a high voice, so loud that it pierced the walls:

"No—no—never! He must never come—you understand—never!"

And then no longer knowing what she was saying, she pointed with her outstretched arm to Madame Honorat, who was standing in the middle of the room:

"Nor she either—drive her away—I don't want to see her—drive her away!"

Then he rushed to his wife, took her in his arms, and kissed her brow.

"My little Christiane, be calm. What is the matter? Now, be calm!"

She could not speak. Tears gushed from her eyes.

"Make them all go away," she said, "and stay alone with me."

He hastened, distractedly, towards the doctor's wife, and pushing her gently to the door, said:

"Leave us for a few moments, I beg you. She is feverish. I will soothe her. I will look for you again soon."

When he returned to the bed, Christiane had lain down again, and, prostrated, was quietly weeping. And for the first time in his life he wept also.

During the night she grew very feverish and delirium followed.

After some hours of great excitement, the patient began suddenly to talk.

The marquis and Andermatt, who wanted to be near her and were playing cards, counting the tricks in hushed voices, thought that she had called them and started up and went to her bedside.

She did not see them, or did not recognize them. Very pale against her white pillow, with her fair hair hanging over her shoulders, she was gazing with her clear blue eyes at the unknown, mysterious world of the imagination in which madmen live.

Her hands, stretched out on the covers, sometimes stirred, and were agitated with sudden, involuntary movements, startings and tremblings.

She did not seem at first to be talking to anyone, but to be seeing and telling about things. And what she said seemed disconnected, unintelligible. She found a rock too high to jump from. She feared a sprain, and then she did

not know well enough the man who was holding out his arms to her. Then she spoke of perfume. She seemed to be seeking for forgotten phrases: "What is there sweeter? That intoxicates like wine? Wine intoxicates the mind, but perfume intoxicates the fancy. In perfume one tastes the very essence, the pure essence of things and of the world —one tastes the flowers—the trees—the grass of the fields—one can distinguish even the soul of the homes of olden days, that lies sleeping in the old furniture, the old carpets, and the old curtains——"

Then her face became drawn, as if she had undergone long-continued fatigue. She was laboring up a hill, slowly, heavily, and saying to someone: "Oh! carry me again, I beg you, I shall die here! I can walk no further. Won't you carry me as you used to above the gorges? Do you remember—how you loved me!"

Then she uttered a cry of anguish. A look of horror crossed her eyes. She saw a dead animal in front of her and begged that they would take it away from there without paining her.

The marquis said very low to his son-in-law:

"She is thinking of a donkey that we came across on our way back from La Nugère."

Now she was talking to the dead animal, comforting it, assuring it that she herself was also very unhappy, much more unhappy, because she had been forsaken.

Then suddenly she refused to do something that was required of her. She cried: "Oh! no, not that! Oh! it is you—you—who wish me to drag that cart!"

Then she panted as if she were really dragging along a cart. She wept, she moaned, she uttered cries, and all the time, for more than half an hour, she was climbing up that hill, dragging behind her with terrible efforts what was, without doubt, the donkey's cart.

And someone was beating her harshly, for she said: "Oh! how you hurt me! At least do not beat me any more, I will go on—but don't beat me any more, I entreat you—I will do as you wish, but do not beat me any more!"

Then she gradually calmed down, and her mind only wandered slightly until dawn. Then she grew drowsy, and ended by falling asleep. When she awoke at about two o'clock in the afternoon, she was still feverish, but her reason had returned. But until the next day her mind was dull, a little unsettled, and flighty. She could not find at once the words she wanted, and tired herself terribly trying to think of them.

But after a night's rest she regained complete possession of herself.

Still she felt that she was changed, as if this crisis had transformed her soul. She suffered less and thought more. The terrible events that were so recent seemed to her to have fallen back into a remote past, and she looked upon them with a clearness of vision with which her mind had never before been enlightened. This light which had suddenly pervaded her, and which illumines some souls in certain hours of suffering, revealed to her life, men, events, and the whole world with all it contains, as she had never before beheld them.

Now, even more than on the night when, in her own room, she had felt

so alone in the world, after returning from the lake of Tazenat, she deemed herself wholly forsaken in life. She perceived that all human beings go along side by side, through the events of life, without anything really uniting two beings together. She felt, because of the treachery of the one in whom she had put all her trust, that the others, all the others, would never be anything more to her than indifferent neighbors in this journey, long or short, sad or gay, onward through to-morrows that could not be forecast.

She divined the futile effort, ceaseless since the beginning of the world, the unwearying effort of men to break through the shell in which their soul struggles, forever imprisoned, forever solitary—an effort of arms, of lips, of eyes, of trembling flesh, an effort of love that exhausts itself in kisses and ends only by giving life to another desolate being!

Then she was seized with an irresistible longing to see her daughter again. She asked for her, and when they had brought her she begged them to undress it, as so far she had seen only its face.

The nurse unrolled the swaddling clothes and revealed the poor little body of a new-born infant, agitated by those vague motions that betoken life in these human beings in miniature. Christiane touched it timidly, tremblingly, with a timid, trembling hand, then wished to kiss it from head to foot, then she gazed at it, her mind filled with strange thoughts.

And, pressing the infant to her heart, she murmured: "Adieu—adieu!" It was to him that she said "adieu," whispering it in her baby's ear, the brave and heartbroken farewell of a proud soul, the farewell of a woman who will suffer for a long time, perhaps forever, but who will know, at least, how to hide her tears.

"Ah! ah!" cried William, through the half-open door. "I have caught you! Will you give me back my baby?"

Running up to the bed, he caught the little one up in his arms, which were already used to handling it, and as he lifted it up over his head, he kept saying:

"Good-morning, Mademoiselle Andermatt—good-morning, Mademoiselle Andermatt."

Christiane thought: "So this, then, is my husband." And she looked at him with surprised eyes, as though she were looking at him for the first time. It was he, the man to whom the law had united her, had given her! The man who should be, according to the religious and social ideas of mankind, a half of herself! more than that, her master, the master of her soul and body! She felt inclined to smile, so strange did all this seem to her now, for between herself and him no bond had ever existed, none of those bonds that are, alas! so quickly broken, but which seem eternal, ineffably sweet, almost divine.

Why was it? They were too different, no doubt, too remote from one another, of races too dissimilar. He understood nothing of her nature, she understood nothing of his. Yet he was good, devoted, affectionate.

Perhaps only beings of the same mold, of the same nature, and of the same moral essence could feel themselves bound to one another by the sacred chain of voluntary duty.

They dressed the child again. Wil-

am had sat down.

"Listen, my darling," he said, "I don't are announce any visitors to you since ie welcome you gave Dr. Black. But et there is one whom you would make ie very happy by receiving; it is Dr. onnefille!"

Then for the first time, she laughed, colorless laugh that escaped her lips, ut did not come from her heart, and ie asked:

"Dr. Bonnefille? What a miracle! re you reconciled?"

"Why, yes, listen. I am going to tell ou a great secret, a great piece of ews. I have just bought the old estab- shment. I have the whole place now. h, isn't that a victory? Of course poor ld Bonnefille knew it before anyone. o he was shrewd; he has been to quire after you every day, leaving s card with a word of sympathy. As or me, I responded to his advances y a call; and now we are the best friends."

"Let him come," said Christiane, whenever he likes. I shall be glad to e him."

"That's good, thank you. I will bring m to see you to-morrow morning. I eed not tell you that Paul is con- antly intrusting me with a thousand essages for you, and he inquires a eat deal after the baby. He wants ry much to see her."

In spite of her resolutions, she felt pressed. Yet she was able to say:

"You must thank him for me."

Andermatt went on:

"He was very anxious to know if his gagement had been announced to you. told him yes; then he asked me sev- al times what you thought about it."

She made a great effort of will, and murmured:

"Tell him that I approve of it en- tirely."

William, with cruel pertinacity, went on:

"He was very insistent to know what you will name your daughter. I told him that we were undecided between Marguerite and Geneviève."

"I have changed my mind," she said. "I want to name her Arlette."

Months before, she had discussed with Paul the name she would choose for a son or for a daughter; and for a daughter she was undecided between Geneviève and Marguerite. She no longer wanted either of these two names.

William repeated:

"Arlette—Arlette. That's very nice—you are right. For my part, I would have liked to name her Christiane, after you. I adore that—Christiane!"

She gave a deep sigh.

"Ah! that foretells too much suffering to bear the name of the Crucified."

He blushed, not having thought at all of this connection, and rose.

"But then, Arlette is very nice. Good- by, for a little while, darling."

As soon as he was gone, she called the nurse, and told her from that time on to place the cradle by her bedside.

When the dainty bed, that looked like a light boat, always swinging and carry- ing its white curtain like a sail on its mast of twisted copper, had been rolled beside the large bed, Christiane stretched out her hand to the sleeping child and said very low: "Go by-by, my baby. You will never find anyone who will love you as much as I."

She passed the following days in

a gentle melancholy, thinking a great deal, building up an unyielding soul and a brave heart, to take up her life again in a few weeks. Now her chief occupation was gazing into her baby's eyes, trying to surprise there the first look of recognition, but seeing nothing except two bluish holes invariably turned towards the sunlight of the window.

And she felt again the most profound sadness as she thought that those eyes, still slumbering, would look upon the world as she herself had looked on it, through the illusion of an inner dream that makes the souls of young women happy, trusting and gay. Those eyes would love all that she had loved, the beautiful clear days, the flowers, the woods, and human beings also, alas! They would love a man, no doubt! They would love a man! They would bear in them his known and well-loved image, would see him again when he was distant, would kindle when he returned. And then—and then—they would learn to weep! Tears, dreadful tears would flow over those little cheeks! And the terrible grief of love that was betrayed, would make them unrecognizable, wild with anguish and despair, the poor wandering eyes, that would be blue.

And she took the baby in a wild embrace, and said: "Love only me, my child!"

At last, one day, Professor Mas-Roussel, who came to see her every morning, said:

"Later on, you can sit up for a little while, madame."

Andermatt, when the doctor had gone, said to his wife:

"It is very unfortunate that you are not quite well, for we are going to try a very interesting experiment at the establishment to-day. Dr. Latonne has performed a real miracle on Père Clovis by having him take his treatment of automatic gymnastics. Imagine it! This old vagabond walks now nearly as well as anyone. The progress of the cure is self-evident after each treatment."

She asked, to please him:

"And are you going to have a public exhibition?"

"Yes and no. We are going to have a clinic before the doctors and a few friends."

"At what time?"

"At three o'clock."

"Will Monsieur Brétigny be there?"

"Yes, yes. He promised me that he would come. All the board will be there. From a medical standpoint, it is very curious."

"Well," she said, "as I shall be up at that hour will you ask Monsieur Brétigny to come and see me? He can entertain me while you are looking at the experiment."

"Yes, my darling."

"You won't forget?"

"No, no, don't worry." And he went to look up the spectators.

After he had been fooled by the Oriols at the time of the first treatment of the paralytic, he had in his turn imposed on the credulity of the invalids, who are so easy to convince when it's a question of cure, and now he imposed on himself the farce of this cure, speaking of it so often, with so much enthusiasm and conviction that it would have been very difficult for him to have determined whether he believed it or did not believe it.

About three o'clock all the persons whom he had enlisted were gathered in

front of the door of the establishment, awaiting the coming of Père Clovis. He arrived leaning on two canes and dragging his legs, and bowed politely to everybody along the way. The two Oriols followed him with the two young girls. Paul and Gontran were escorting their fiancées.

Dr. Latonne was waiting in the large hall where the automatic instruments were installed. He was talking with Andermatt and with Dr. Honorat.

When he perceived Père Clovis, a smile of delight passed over his smooth-shaven lips. He asked:

"Well! how are we to-day?"

"Oh, pretty well, pretty well!"

Petrus Martel and Saint-Landri appeared. They wanted to know the facts. The former believed, the latter doubted. Behind them to everyone's amazement, came Dr. Bonnefille, who bowed to his rival and shook hands with Andermatt. Dr. Black came last.

"Well, messieurs and mesdemoiselles," said Dr. Latonne, bowing towards Louise and Charlotte Oriol, "you are going to assist at a very curious spectacle. Observe first before the experiment that this good man walks a little, but very little. Can you walk without your sticks, Père Clovis?"

"Oh, no! *Môchieu.*"

"Very good, we will commence."

They hoisted the old fellow into the armchair, strapped his legs to the movable feet of the seat, then when the inspector said: "Start gently," the attendant, with his arm bared, turned the lever.

Then they saw the vagabond's right knee rise, stretch out, bend and stretch out again, then the left knee did the same. Père Clovis filled with sudden mirth commenced to laugh and kept time, with his head and his long white beard, with all the movements that his legs were made to make.

The four physicians and Andermatt bent over him and examined him with the solemnity of augurs, while Colosse exchanged mischievous winks with the old rascal.

As the doors had been left open, other people kept coming in all the time, bathers who were convinced and anxiously pressed forward to see. "Faster," ordered Dr. Latonne. The workman turned faster. The old man's legs began to run, and he himself, seized with irresistible mirth, like a child that is tickled, laughed with all his might, as he wagged his head wildly. And he kept calling out in the midst of his bursts of laughter: "It's a *rigolo,* it's a *rigolo!*" having no doubt picked up this word from the lips of some foreigner.

Colosse in his turn was bursting with laughter, and stamping his foot on the ground, and slapping his sides with his hands, he cried:

"Ah! *bougrrre* of a Cloviche—*bougrrre* of a Cloviche."

"Enough!" said the inspector.

Then the spectators saw Père Clovis get up alone from his armchair; and he walked. He took short steps, it is true, and was all bent over, and made faces with fatigue at every effort; but he walked.

Dr. Bonnefille was the first to speak:

"It's an altogether remarkable case."

Dr. Black at once outdid his colleague in his praise. Dr. Honorat alone said nothing.

Gontran whispered in Paul's ear:

"I don't see through it. Look at their faces. Are they dupes or sycophants?"

But Andermatt was talking. He related the history of this cure from the very first day, the relapse and the final cure that was lasting and complete. He added gaily:

"And if our patient has a slight recurrence every winter, we will cure him up again every summer."

Then he made a pompous eulogy on the waters of Mont-Oriol, and praised their properties, all their properties:

"I myself," he said, "have seen an instance of their efficacy in the case of one who is very dear to me, and if my family does not die out, it will be due to Mont-Oriol."

But all at once he remembered something. He had promised his wife Paul Brétigny's visit. His regret was keen, as he was full of affectionate care for her. So he looked around him, saw Paul, rejoined him, and said:

"My dear friend, I completely forgot to tell you that Christiane is now waiting to see you."

Brétigny faltered: "Me—at this moment?"

"Yes, she is sitting up to-day and she wanted to see you before anybody else. So run over quickly, and excuse my forgetfulness."

Paul went towards the hotel, his heart throbbing with emotion.

On the way he met the Marquis de Ravenel who said to him:

"My daughter is up and is astonished not to have seen you yet."

He paused, however, on the lowest steps of the stairway to think what he would say to her. How would she receive him? Would she be alone? If she spoke about his engagement what should he reply?

Since he had known that she was ill, he could not think of her without trembling with anxiety; and every time the thought of their first meeting passed through his mind it made him suddenly flush or grow pale with anxiety. He felt that he had sunk into one of those sloughs that stain a man's conscience till death. But he dreaded above all the glance of this woman whom he had loved so intensely, for such a short time.

Would she meet him with reproaches, tears, or contempt? Would she only receive him to drive him away?

And what should be his attitude towards her? Humble, grieved, entreating, or cold? Should he explain himself, or listen without answering? Should he sit or stand?

And when they showed him the child, what should he do? What should he say? With what emotion should he appear to be agitated?

He paused again in front of the door, and just as he was going to ring the bell, he saw that his hand was trembling.

However, he pressed his finger against the little ivory button, and he heard the jingling of the electric bell inside the apartment.

A maid came to the door and asked him in. And from the parlor door he saw, at the end of the second room, Christiane lying on her invalid chair and looking at him.

These two rooms that he had to cross seemed to him interminable. He felt he was staggering, he was afraid of knocking against the chairs, and he dared not look at his feet, so as not to cast down his eyes. She did not make any gesture, she did not say a word, she waited until he was near her. Her

right hand lay stretched out on her dress, and her left hand rested on the edge of the cradle all enclosed with curtains.

When he was three steps from her, he paused, not knowing what he should do. The maid had closed the door behind him.

They were alone.

Then he longed to fall on his knees and beg her pardon. But she slowly raised her hand which lay on her dress, and, extending it slightly towards him, said: "Good-morning," in a grave tone.

He did not dare to take her hand, although he touched it lightly with his lips, as he bowed. She added:

"Sit down."

He sat on a low chair near her feet.

He felt he ought to talk, but he could not find a word, not an idea, and he no longer even dared to look at her. But at last he stammered:

"Your husband had forgotten to tell me that you were waiting for me or I should have come sooner."

She replied:

"Oh! it doesn't matter! As long as we have to see one another again—a little sooner—a little later!"

As she added nothing, he hastened to ask:

"You are better now, I hope?"

"Thank you. As well as can be expected."

She was very pale, thinner, but prettier than before. Her eyes especially had acquired a depth of expression that he had never seen in them before. They seemed of a darker hue, of a less clear blue, less transparent, more intense. Her hands were so white that they seemed like death.

She went on: "There are hours hard to live through. But when one has suffered so, one feels strong till the end of one's days."

Strongly moved, he murmured: "Yes, they are terrible ordeals."

She repeated like an echo: "Terrible."

For some moments, slight moments, those almost imperceptible sounds of a child, wakening from sleep had come from the cradle. Brétigny did not take his eyes from it, he was a prey to a painful, increasing uneasiness, and was tortured by the desire to see the child that was lying within.

Then he saw that the curtains of the little bed were fastened above and below with the gold pins that Christiane usually used to wear in her dress. He had often amused himself in bygone days by unpinning them and fastening them again on the shoulders of his beloved, those dainty pins with heads shaped like crescents. He understood what she wished; and a keen emotion seized him, and made him shrink before this barrier of golden pins, which separated him forever from this child. A soft cry, a faint wail rose from this white prison. Christiane at once rocked the little cradle, and said a little hastily:

"I ask your pardon for giving you so little time, but I must attend to my daughter."

He rose, kissed once more the hand that she held out to him, and just as he was leaving, she said:

"I pray for your happiness."

THE END

VOLUME VI

STRONG AS DEATH

STRONG AS DEATH

PART I

CHAPTER I

A DUEL OF HEARTS

Broad daylight streamed down into the vast studio through a skylight in the ceiling, which showed a large square of dazzling blue, a bright vista of limitless heights of azure, across which passed flocks of birds in rapid flight. But the glad light of heaven hardly entered this severe room, with high ceilings and draped walls, before it began to grow soft and dim, to slumber among the hangings and die in the portières, hardly penetrating to the dark corners where the gilded frames of portraits gleamed like flame. Peace and sleep seemed imprisoned there, the peace characteristic of an artist's dwelling, where the human soul has toiled. Within these walls, where thought abides, struggles, and becomes exhausted in its violent efforts, everything appears weary and overcome as soon as the energy of action is abated; all seems dead after the great crises of life, and the furniture, the hangings, and the portraits of great personages still unfinished on the canvases, all seem to rest as if the whole place had suffered the master's fatigue and had toiled with him, taking part in the daily renewal of his struggle. A vague, heavy odor of paint, turpentine and tobacco was in the air, clinging to the rugs and chairs; and no sound broke the deep silence save the sharp, short cries of the swallows that flitted above the open skylight, and the dull, ceaseless roar of Paris, hardly heard above the roofs. Nothing moved except a little cloud of smoke that rose intermittently toward the ceiling with every puff that Olivier Bertin, lying upon his divan, blew slowly from a cigarette between his lips. With gaze lost in the distant sky, he tried to think of a new subject for a painting. What should he do? As yet he did not know. He was by no means resolute and sure of himself as an artist, but was of an uncertain, restless disposition, his inspiration always hesitating as to the line of art it should follow. Rich, illustrious, the gainer of all honors, he nevertheless remained, in these his later years, a man who did not know exactly toward what ideal he had been aiming. He had won the *Prix de Rome,* had been the defender of traditions, and had evoked, like so many others, the great scenes of history; then, modernizing his tendencies, he had painted living men, but in a way that showed the influence of classic memories. Intelligent, enthusiastic, a worker that clung to his changing dreams, in love with his art, which he knew to

perfection, he had acquired, thanks to his subtle intelligence, remarkable skill and great versatility, due in some degree to his indecision and his experiments in all directions of art. Perhaps, too, the sudden admiration of the world for his works, elegant, correct, and full of distinction, influenced his character and prevented him from becoming what he naturally might have been. Since the triumph of his first success, the desire to please was always foremost, without his being conscious of it; it influenced his actions and weakened his convictions. This desire to please was also apparent in him in many ways, and had contributed much to his fame.

His grace of manner, all his habits of life, the care he devoted to his person, his long-standing reputation for strength and agility as a swordsman and an equestrian, had added further attraction to his steadily growing fame. After his *Cléopatra,* the first canvas that made him illustrious, Paris suddenly became enamored of him, adopted him, made a pet of him; and all at once he became one of those brilliant, fashionable artists one meets in the Bois, for whose presence hostesses manœuver, and whom the Institute welcomes thenceforth. He had entered it as a conqueror, with the approval of all Paris.

Thus Fortune had led him to the beginning of old age, coddling and caressing him.

Under the influence of the beautiful day, which he knew was glowing without, Bertin sought a poetic subject. He felt somewhat dreamy, however, after his breakfast and his cigarette; he pondered awhile, gazing into space, in fancy sketching rapidly against the blue sky the figures of graceful women in the Bois or on the sidewalk of a street, lovers by the water—all the pleasing fancies in which his thoughts revelled. The changing images stood out against the bright sky, vague and fleeting in his illusive vision, while the swallows, darting through space in ceaseless flight, seemed trying to efface them as if with strokes of a pen.

He found nothing. All these half-seen visions resembled things that he had already done; all the women appeared to be the daughters or the sisters of those that had already been born of his artistic fancy; and the vague fear, that had haunted him for a year, that he had lost the power to create, had made the round of all subjects and exhausted his inspiration, outlined itself distinctly before this review of his work —this lack of power to dream anew, to discover the unknown.

He arose quietly to look among his unfinished sketches, hoping to find something that would inspire him with a new idea.

Still puffing at his cigarette, he proceeded to turn over the sketches, drawings and rough drafts that he kept in a large old closet; but, soon becoming disgusted with this vain quest, and feeling depressed by fatigue, he tossed away his cigarette, whistled a popular street-song, and bent down and picked up a heavy dumb-bell that lay under a chair. Having raised with the other hand a curtain that draped a mirror which served him in judging the accuracy of a pose, in verifying his perspectives and testing the reality, he placed himself in front of it and began to swing the dumb-bell, meanwhile looking intently at himself.

He had been celebrated in the studios

or his strength; then, in the gay world, or his good looks. But now the weight of years was making him heavy. Tall, with broad shoulders and full chest, he had acquired the paunch of an old wrestler, although he kept up his fencing every day and rode his horse with assiduity. His head was still remarkable and as handsome as ever, although in a style different from that of his earlier days. His thick, short white hair set off his black eyes beneath heavy gray eyebrows, while his luxuriant mustache—the mustache of an old soldier—had remained quite dark, and it gave to his countenance a rare characteristic of energy and pride.

Standing before the mirror, with heels together and body erect, he went through the usual movements with the two iron balls, which he held out at the end of his muscular arm, watching with a complacent expression its evidence of quiet power.

But suddenly, in the glass, which reflected the whole studio, he saw one of the portières move; then appeared a woman's head—only a head, peeping in. A voice behind him asked:

"Anyone here?"

"Present!" he responded promptly, turning round. Then, throwing his dumbbell on the floor, he hastened toward the door with an appearance of youthful agility that was slightly affected.

A woman entered attired in a light summer costume. They shook hands.

"You were exercising, I see," said the lady.

"Yes," he replied; "I was playing peacock, and allowed myself to be surprised."

The lady laughed, and continued:

"Your concierge's lodge was vacant, and as I know you are always alone at this hour, I came up without being announced."

He looked at her.

"Heavens, how beautiful you are! What *chic!*"

"Yes, I have a new frock. Do you think it pretty?"

"Charming, and perfectly harmonious. We can certainly say that nowadays we understand shades of color."

He walked round her, gently touching the material of the gown, adjusting its folds with the tips of his fingers, like a man that knows a woman's toilet as the modiste knows it, having all his life employed his artist's mind and his athlete's muscles in depicting with slender brush changing and delicate fashions, in revealing feminine grace enclosed within a prison of velvet and silk, or hidden by snowy laces. He finished his scrutiny by declaring: "It is a great success, and it becomes you perfectly!"

The lady allowed herself to be admired, quite content to be pretty and to please him.

No longer in her first youth, but still beautiful, not very tall, somewhat plump, but with that freshness which lends to a woman of forty an appearance of having only just reached full maturity, she seemed like one of those roses that flourish for an indefinite time up to the moment when, in too full a bloom, they fall in an hour.

Beneath her blonde hair she possessed all the alert and youthful grace of those Parisian women who never grow old; who carry within themselves a surprising vital force, an indomitable power of resistance, and who remain for twenty years triumphant and inde-

structible, careful above all things of their bodies and ever watchful of their health.

She raised her veil and murmured:

"Well, you do not kiss me!"

"I have been smoking."

"Pooh!" said the lady. Then, holding up her face, she added. "So much the worse!"

Their lips met.

He took her parasol and divested her of her spring jacket with a readiness and skill that showed he was accustomed to doing it. As she seated herself on the divan, he asked with an air of interest:

"Is your husband well?"

"Very well; he must be making a speech in the House at this very moment."

"Ah! On what subject?"

"Oh—no doubt on beets or on colza oil, as usual!"

Her husband, the Comte de Guilleroy, deputy from the Eure, made a special study of all questions of agricultural interest.

Perceiving in one corner a sketch that she did not recognize, the lady walked across the studio, asking, "What is that?"

"A pastel that I have just begun—the portrait of the Princesse de Pontève."

"You know," said the lady gravely, "that if you go back to painting portraits of women I shall close your studio. I know only too well to what that sort of thing leads!"

"Oh, one does not make a portrait of Any more than once!" was the answer.

"I hope not, indeed!"

She examined the newly begun pastel sketch with the air of a woman that understands the technic of art. She stepped back, advanced, made a shade of her hand, sought the place where the best light fell on the sketch, and finally expressed her satisfaction.

"It is very good. You succeed admirably with pastel work."

"Do you think so?" murmured the flattered artist.

"Yes; it is a most delicate art, needing great distinction of style. It cannot be handled by masons in the art of painting."

For twelve years the countess had encouraged the painter's leaning toward the distinguished in art, opposing his occasional return to the simplicity of realism; and, in consideration of the demands of fashionable modern elegance, she had tenderly urged him toward an ideal of grace that was slightly affected and artificial.

"What is the princess like?" she asked.

He was compelled to give her all sorts of details—those minute details in which the jealous and subtle curiosity of women delights, passing from remarks upon her toilet to criticisms of her intelligence.

Suddenly she inquired: "Does she flirt with you?"

He laughed, and declared that she did not.

Then, putting both hands on the shoulders of the painter, the countess gazed fixedly at him. The ardor of her questioning look caused a quiver in the pupils of her blue eyes, flecked with almost imperceptible black points, like tiny ink-spots.

Again she murmured: "Truly, now she is not a flirt?"

"No, indeed, I assure you!"

"Well, I do not worry, anyway," said the countess. "You never will love anyone but me now. It is all over for the others. It is too late, my poor dear!"

The painter experienced that slight painful emotion which touches the heart of middle-aged men when someone mentions their age; and he murmured: "To-day and to-morrow, as yesterday, there never has been in my life, and never will be, anyone but you, Any."

She took him by the arm, and turning again toward the divan, made him sit beside her.

"Of what were you thinking?" she asked.

"I am looking for a subject to paint."

"What, pray?"

"I don't know, you see, since I am still seeking it."

"What have you been doing lately?"

He was obliged to tell her of all the visits he had received, about all the dinners and *soirées* he had attended, and to repeat all the conversations and chit-chat. Both were really interested in all these futile and familiar details of fashionable life. The little rivalries, the flirtations, either well known or suspected, the ready-made criticisms of the same persons, heard and repeated a thousand times, the same events and opinions, were bearing away and drowning both their minds in that troubled and agitated stream called Parisian life. Knowing everyone in all classes of society, as an artist to whom all doors were open, she as the elegant wife of a Conservative deputy, they were experts in that sport of brilliant French chatter, amiably satirical, trivial, brilliant but flippant, a certain shibboleth which gives a particular and greatly envied reputation to those whose tongues have become supple in this sort of malicious small talk.

"When are you coming to dine?" she asked suddenly.

"Whenever you wish. Name your day."

"Friday. I shall have the Duchesse de Mortemain, the Corbelles, and Musadieu, in honor of my daughter's return—she is coming this evening. But do not speak of it, my friend. It is a secret."

"Oh, yes, I accept. I shall be charmed to see Annette again. I have not seen her in three years."

"Yes, that is true. Three years!"

Though Annette, in her earliest years, had been brought up in Paris in her parents' home, she had become the object of the last and passionate affection of her grandmother, Madame Paradin, who, almost blind, lived all the year round on her son-in-law's estate at the castle of Roncières, on the Eure. Little by little, the old lady had kept the child with her more and more, and as the Guilleroys passed almost half their time in this domain, to which a variety of interests, agricultural and political, called them frequently, it ended in taking the little girl to Paris on occasional visits, for she herself preferred the free and active life of the country to the cloistered life of the city.

For three years she had not visited Paris even once, the countess having preferred to keep her entirely away from it, in order that a new taste for its gaieties should not be awakened in her before the day fixed for her début in society. Madame de Guilleroy had given her in the country two governesses, with

unexceptionable diplomas, and had visited her mother and her daughter more frequently than before. Moreover, Annette's residence at the château was rendered almost necessary by the presence of the old lady.

Formerly, Olivier Bertin had passed six weeks or two months at Roncières every year; but in the past three years rheumatism had sent him to watering-places at some distance, and these had so revived his love for Paris that after his return he could not bring himself to leave it.

The young girl, according to the agreement, should not have returned home until autumn, but her father had suddenly conceived a plan for her marriage, and sent for her that she might meet immediately the Marquis de Farandal, to whom he wished her to be betrothed. But this plan was kept quite secret, and Madame de Guilleroy had told only Olivier Bertin of it, in strict confidence.

"Then your husband has quite decided upon it?" said he at last.

"Yes; I even think it a very good idea."

Then they talked of other things.

She returned to the subject of painting, and wished to make him decide to paint a Christ. He opposed the suggestion, thinking that there was already enough of them in the world; but she persisted, and grew impatient in her argument.

"Oh, if I knew how to draw I would give you my impression: it should be very new, very bold. They are taking Him down from the cross, and the man who has detached the hands has let drop the whole upper part of the body. It has fallen upon the crowd below, and they lift their arms to receive and sustain it. Do you understand?"

Yes, he understood; he even thought the conception quite original; but he was just now in a modern vein, and as his fair friend reclined upon the divan, with one daintily-shod foot peeping out, the skin gleaming through the almost transparent stocking, he said: "Ah, that is what we should paint! That is life—a woman's foot at the edge of her skirt! Into that subject one may put everything—truth, desire, poetry. Nothing is more graceful or more charming than a woman's foot; and what mystery it suggests: the hidden limb, lost yet imagined beneath its veiling folds of drapery!"

"Isn't that elegant, distinguished, and expressive—more expressive than the hand? Show me your hand, Any!"

She wore long gloves reaching to the elbow. In order to remove one she took it by the upper edge and slipped it down quickly. The arm appeared, white, plump, round, so suddenly bared as to produce an idea of complete and bold nudity.

She held out her hand, which drooped from the wrist. The rings sparkled on her white fingers, and the narrow pink nails seemed like amorous claws protruding at the tips of that little feminine paw.

Olivier Bertin handled it tenderly and admiringly. He played with the fingers as if they were live toys, while saying:

"What a strange thing! What a strange thing! What a pretty little member, intelligent and adroit, which makes whatever one wills—books, laces, houses, pyramids, locomotives, pastry, or gives caresses, which last is its pleasantest function."

He drew off the rings one by one, and as the wedding-ring fell in its turn, he murmured smilingly:

"The law! Let us salute it!"

"Nonsense!" said the countess, slightly wounded.

Bertin had always been inclined to satirical banter, that tendency of the French to mingle irony with the most serious sentiments, and he had often unintentionally made her sad, without knowing how to understand the subtle distinctions of women, or to discern the border of sacred ground, as he himself said. Above all things it vexed her whenever he alluded with a touch of familiar lightness to their friendship, which was an affair of such long standing that he declared it the most beautiful example of love in the nineteenth century. After a silence, she inquired:

"Will you take Annette and me to the varnishing-day reception?"

"Certainly."

Then she asked him about the best pictures to be shown at the next exposition, which was to open in a fortnight.

Suddenly, however, she appeared to recollect something she had forgotten.

"Come, give me my things," she said. "I am going now."

And, rising, she approached the table, on which were scattered papers, open letters, old and recent, beside a painter's inkstand, in which the ink had dried. She looked at it all with curiosity, touched the papers, and lifted them to look underneath.

Bertin approached her, saying:

"You will disarrange my disorder."

Without replying to this, she inquired:

"Who is the gentlemen that wishes to buy your *Baigneuses?*"

"An American whom I do not know."

"Have you come to an agreement about the *Chanteuse des rues?*"

"Yes. Ten thousand."

"You did well. It was pretty, but not exceptional. Good-by, dear."

She presented her cheek, which he brushed with a calm kiss; then she disappeared through the portières, saying in an undertone:

"Friday—eight o'clock. I do not wish you to go with me to the door—you know that very well. Good-by!"

When she had gone he first lighted another cigarette, then he began to pace slowly to and fro in his studio. All the past of this friendship unfolded itself before him. He recalled all its details, now long remote, sought them and put them together, interested in this solitary pursuit of reminiscences.

It was at the moment when he had just risen like a star on the horizon of artistic Paris, when the painters were monopolizing the favor of the public, and had built up a quarter with magnificent dwellings, earned by a few strokes of the brush.

After his return from Rome, in 1864, he had lived for some years without success or renown; then suddenly, in 1868, he exhibited his *Cleopatra,* and in a few days was being praised to the skies by both critics and public.

In 1872, after the war, and after the death of Henri Regnault had made a sort of pedestal of glory for all his fellow artists, a *Jocaste,* a bold subject, classed Bertin among the daring, although his wisely original execution made him acceptable even to the Academicians. In 1873 a first medal placed him beyond competition with his

Juive d'Alger, which he exhibited on his return from a trip to Africa, and a portrait of the Princesse de Salia, in 1874, gave him a place in the fashionable world as the first portrait painter of his day. From that time he became the favorite painter of Parisian women of that class, the most skilful and ingenious interpreter of their grace, their bearing, and their nature. In a few months all the distinguished women in Paris solicited the favor of being reproduced by his brush. He was hard to please, and made them pay well for that favor.

After he had become the rage, and was received everywhere as a man of the world, he saw one day, at the Duchesse de Mortemain's house, a young woman in deep mourning, who was just leaving as he entered, and who, in this chance meeting in a doorway, dazzled him with a charming vision of grace and elegance.

On inquiring her name, he learned that she was the Comtesse de Guilleroy, wife of a Normandy country squire, agriculturist and deputy; that she was in mourning for her husband's father; and that she was very intellectual, greatly admired, and much sought after.

Struck by the apparition that had delighted his artist's eye, he said:

"Ah, there is some one whose portrait I should paint willingly!"

This remark was repeated to the young countess the next day, and that evening Bertin received a little blue-tinted note, delicately perfumed, in a small, regular handwriting, slanting a little from left to right, which said:

MONSIEUR: The Duchesse de Mortemain, who has just left my house, has assured me that you would be disposed to make, from my poor face, one of your masterpieces. I would entrust it to you willingly if I were certain that you did not speak idly, and that you really see in me something that you could reproduce and idealize.

Accept, Monsieur, my sincere regards.

ANNE DE GUILLEROY.

He answered this note, asking when he might present himself at the countess' house, and received an unceremonious invitation to breakfast on the following Monday.

It was on the first floor of a large and luxurious modern house in the Boulevard Malesherbes. Passing through a large salon with blue silk walls, framed in white and gold, the painter was shown into a sort of boudoir hung with tapestries of the last century, light and coquettish, those tapestries *à la Watteau,* with their dainty coloring and graceful figures, which seem to have been designed and executed by workmen dreaming of love.

He had just seated himself when the countess appeared. She walked so lightly that he had not heard her coming through the next room and was surprised when he saw her. She extended her hand in graceful welcome.

"And so it is true," said she, "that you really wish to paint my portrait?"

"I shall be very happy to do so, madame."

Her close-fitting black gown made her look very slender and very youthful, though it gave her a serious air, which was belied, however, by her smiling face, lighted up by her bright golden hair. The count entered, leading by the hand a little six-year-old girl.

Madame de Guilleroy presented him, saying, "My husband."

The count was rather short and wore no mustache. His cheeks were hollow, with a bluish tint from his close-shaven beard. He had somewhat the appearance of a priest or an actor. His hair was long and was tossed back carelessly; his manner was polished, and around the mouth two large circular lines extended from the cheeks to the chin, seeming to have been acquired from the habit of speaking in public.

He thanked the painter with a flourish of phrases that betrayed the orator. He had wished for a long time to have a portrait of his wife, and certainly he would have chosen M. Olivier Bertin, had he not feared a refusal, for he well knew that the painter was overwhelmed with orders.

It was arranged, then, with much ceremony on both sides, that the count should accompany the countess to the studio the next day. He asked, however, whether it would not be better to wait, because of the countess' deep mourning; but the painter declared that he wished to portray the first impression she had made upon him and the striking contrast of her animated, delicate head, luminous under the golden hair, with the austere black of her garments.

She came, then, the following day with her husband, and afterward with her daughter, whom the artist seated before a table covered with picture-books.

Olivier Bertin, following his usual custom, showed himself very reserved. Fashionable women made him a little uneasy, for he hardly knew them. He supposed them to be at once immoral and shallow, hypocritical and dangerous, frivolous and in the way. Among the women of the *demi-monde* he had had some passing adventures due to his renown, his lively wit, his elegant and athletic figure and his dark and animated face. He preferred them, too; he liked their free ways and frank speech, accustomed as he was to the gay and easy manners of the studios and green-rooms he frequented. He went into the fashionable world for the sake of fame, not because he cared for it; it gratified his vanity. He received congratulations and commissions and played the gallant to charming ladies who flattered him, but he never paid court to any of them. As he did not allow himself to indulge in daring pleasantries and spicy jests in their society, he thought them all prudes, and himself was considered as having good taste. Whenever one of them came to pose at his studio, he felt, in spite of any advances she might make to please him, that disparity of rank which prevents any real unity between artists and fashionable people, no matter how much they may be thrown together. Behind the smiles and the admiration which among women are always a little artificial, he felt the indefinable mental reserve of the being that judges itself of superior essence. This roused in him a little feeling of pride, which showed itself in a bearing of almost haughty respect, dissembling the vanity of the *parvenu* who is treated as an equal by princes and princesses, who owes to his talent the honor accorded to others through their birth. People remarked in a slightly surprised tone: "He is really very well bred!" This surprise, although it flattered him, also wounded him, for it indicated a certain social barrier.

The admirable and ceremonious gravity of the painter a little annoyed Madame de Guilleroy, who could find nothing to say to this distant-mannered man, who yet had a reputation for cleverness.

After settling her little daughter, she would come and sit in an armchair near the newly begun sketch, and try, according to the artist's directions, to give some expression to her physiognomy.

In the midst of the fourth sitting he suddenly ceased painting and inquired:

"What amuses you more than anything else in life?"

She appeared somewhat embarrassed.

"Why, I hardly know. Why this question?"

"I need a happy thought in those eyes, and I have not seen it yet."

"Well, try to make me talk; I love to chat."

"Are you cheerful?"

"Very cheerful."

"Well, then, let us chat, madame."

He had said "Let us chat, madame" in a very grave tone. Then, resuming his painting, he touched upon a variety of subjects, seeking something on which their minds could meet. They began by exchanging observations on the people that both knew. Then they talked of themselves—always the most agreeable and fascinating subject for a chat.

When they met again the next day they felt more at ease, and Bertin, noting that he pleased and amused her, began to relate some of the details of his artist life, allowing himself to give free scope to his reminiscences in a fanciful way that was peculiar to him.

Accustomed to the dignified presence of the literary lights of the salons, the countess was surprised at this almost unrestrained animation which touched on subjects so plainly and with a touch of satire, and presently she began to answer in the same way, with a grace at once daring and delicate.

In a week's time she had conquered and charmed him by her good humor, frankness and simplicity. He had entirely forgotten his prejudice against fashionable women and would willingly have declared that they alone had charm and fascination. As he painted, standing before his canvas, advancing and retreating, with the movements of a man fighting, he allowed his fancy to flow freely, as if he had long known this pretty woman, blonde and black, made of sunlight and mourning, seated before him, laughing and listening, answering him gaily with so much animation that she lost her pose every moment.

Sometimes he would move far away from her, closing one eye, leaning over her for a searching study of his model's pose. Then he would draw very near to her for the slightest shadows of her face, to catch the most fleeting expression, to seize and reproduce that which is in a woman's face beyond its mere outward appearance; that emanation of ideal beauty, that reflection of something indescribable, that personal and intimate charm peculiar to each, which causes her to be loved to distraction by one and not by another.

One afternoon the little girl came and stood before the canvas and asked with childish gravity:

"That is mamma, isn't it?"

The artist took her in his arms to kiss her, flattered by that naïve homage to the truth of the likeness.

Another day, when she had been very quiet, they suddenly heard her say in a sad little voice:

"Mamma, I am so tired of this!"

The painter was so touched by this first complaint that he ordered a shopful of toys to be brought to the studio the following day.

Little Annette, astonished, pleased and always thoughtful, put them in order with great care, that she might play with them one after another, according to the desire of the moment. From the date of this gift she loved the painter as little children love, with that caressing, animal-like affection which makes them so sweet and captivating.

Madame de Guilleroy began to take pleasure in the sittings. She was almost without amusement or occupation that winter, as she was in mourning; so that, for lack of society and entertainments, her chief interest was within the walls of Bertin's studio.

She was the daughter of a rich and hospitable Parisian merchant, who had died several years earlier, and of his ailing wife, whose lack of health kept her in bed six months out of the twelve; and while still very young she had become a perfect hostess, knowing how to receive, to smile, to chat, to estimate character and how to adapt herself to every one, perfectly at her ease in society and always far-seeing and adaptable. When the Comte de Guilleroy was presented to her as her betrothed, she understood at once the advantages to be gained by such a marriage, and, like a sensible girl, admitted them without constraint, knowing well that one cannot have everything and that in every situation we must strike a balance between good and bad.

Launched in the world, much sought after because of her beauty and brilliance, she was admired and courted by many men without ever feeling the least quickening of her heart, which was as sensible as her mind.

She was something of a flirt, however, in a discreet, aggressive way, which never went beyond bounds. Compliments pleased her, awakened desires, fed her vanity, provided she might seem to ignore them; and when she had received for a whole evening the incense of this sort of homage, she slept quietly, as a woman who has accomplished her mission on earth. This existence, which lasted seven years, did not weary her nor seem monotonous, for she adored the incessant excitement of society, but sometimes she felt that she desired something different. The men of her world, lawyer politicians, financiers or wealthy idlers, amused her as actors might; she did not take them too seriously, although she appreciated their functions, their stations and their titles.

The painter pleased her at first because such a man was an absolute novelty to her. She found the studio a very amusing place, laughed gaily, felt that she, too, was clever, and was grateful to him for the pleasure she took in the sittings. He pleased her, too, because he was handsome, strong and famous; no woman, whatever she may pretend, being indifferent to physical beauty and glory. Flattered at having been admired by this genius, and disposed, on her side, to think well of him, she had discovered in him an alert and cultivated mind, delicacy, fancy, the true charm of intelligence and an eloquence of expression that seemed to illumine

whatever he said.

A rapid friendship sprang up between them, and the hand-clasp exchanged every day as she entered seemed more and more to express something of the feeling in their hearts.

Then, without deliberate design, with no definite determination, she felt within her heart a growing desire to fascinate him, and yielded to it. She had foreseen nothing, planned nothing; she was only coquettish with added grace, as a woman always is toward a man who pleases her more than all others; and in her manner with him, in her glances and smiles was that seductive charm that diffuses itself around a woman in whose breast has awakened the need of being loved.

She said flattering things to him which meant "I find you very agreeable, monsieur"; and she made him talk at length in order to show him, by her attention, how much he aroused her interest. He would cease to paint and sit beside her, and in that mental exaltation due to an intense desire to please he had crises of poetry, of gaiety or of philosophy, according to his state of mind that day.

She was merry when he was gay; when he became profound she tried to follow his ideas, though she did not always succeed; and when her mind wandered to other things, she appeared to listen with so perfect an air of comprehension and such apparent enjoyment of his remarks that he became enthused as he noted her attention to his words and was touched at having discovered a mind so delicate, open and docile into which thought fell like a seed.

The portrait progressed and was likely to be good, for the painter had reached the state of emotion that is necessary in order to discover all the qualities of his model and to express them with that convincing ardor which is the inspiration of true artists.

Leaning toward her, watching every movement of her face, all the tints of her flesh, every shadow of her skin, all the expression and the translucence of her eyes, every secret of her physiognomy, he had became saturated with her personality as a sponge absorbs water; and, in transferring to canvas that emanation of disturbing charm which his eye seized and which flowed like a wave from his thought to his brush, he was overcome and intoxicated by it, as if he had drunk deep of the beauty of woman.

She felt that he was drawn toward her and was amused at this game, this victory that was becoming more and more certain, and became interested.

A new feeling gave fresh piquancy to her existence, awakening in her a mysterious joy. When she heard him spoken of her heart throbbed faster and she longed to say—a longing that never rose to her lips—"He is in love with me!" She was glad when people praised his talent and perhaps was even more pleased when she heard him called handsome. When she was alone, thinking of him, with no indiscreet person at hand, she really imagined that in him she had found merely a good friend, one that would always remain content with a cordial hand-clasp.

Often, in the midst of a sitting, he would suddenly put down his palette on the stool and take little Annette in his arms, kissing her tenderly on her hair, and his eyes, while gazing at the mother, said, "It is you, not the child, that I kiss in this way."

Occasionally Madame de Guilleroy did not bring her daughter, but came alone. On these days he worked very little, and the time was spent in talking.

One afternoon she was late. It was a cold day toward the end of February. Olivier had come in early, as was now his habit whenever she had an appointment with him, for he always hoped she would arrive before the usual hour. While waiting he paced to and fro, smoking, and asking himself the question that he was surprised to find himself asking for the hundredth time that week: "Am I in love?" He did not know, never having been really in love. He had had his caprices, certainly, some of which had lasted a long time, but never had he mistaken them for love. To-day he was astonished at the emotion that possessed him.

Did he love her? Heretofore, as soon as a woman attracted him he had desired to make a conquest of her, and had held out his hand toward her as if to gather fruit, but without feeling his heart affected profoundly by either her presence or her absence.

Olivier had believed that love began with reveries and with poetic exaltations. But his feeling, on the contrary, seemed to come from an indefinable emotion, more physical than mental. He was nervous and restless, as if under the shadow of threatening illness, though nothing painful entered into this fever of the blood which imparted its contagion to his mind also. He was quite aware that Madame de Guilleroy was the cause of his agitation; that it was due to the memories she left with him and to the expectation of her return. He did not feel drawn to her by an impulse of his whole being, but he felt her always near him, as if she never had left him; she left him something of herself when she departed—something subtle and inexpressible. What was it? Was it love? He probed deep in his heart in order to see, to understand. He thought her charming, but she was not at all the type of ideal woman that his blind hope had created. When love appeals to any one he has always had a vision of the moral traits and physical charms of her who will enslave him; and Madame de Guilleroy, although she pleased him infinitely, did not appear to him to be that woman.

But why did she thus occupy his thought incessantly, above all others, and in such a different way? Had he simply fallen into the trap set by her coquetry, which he had long suspected and understood and, circumvented by her methods, was he now under the influence of that special fascination which gives to women the desire to please?

He paced here and there, sat down, sprang up, lighted cigarettes and threw them away, and his eyes every instant looked at the clock, whose hands moved toward the usual hour in slow, unhurried fashion.

Several times already he had almost raised the convex glass over the two golden arrows turning so slowly, in order to push the larger one on toward the figure it was approaching so lazily. It seemed to him that this would suffice to make the door open, and that the expected one would appear, deceived and brought to him by this ruse. Then he smiled at this childish, persistent and unreasonable desire.

At last he asked himself this question, "Could I make love to her?" This

idea seemed strange to him, indeed hardly to be realized or even pursued, because of the complications it might bring into his life. Yet she pleased him very much, and he concluded: "Decidedly I am in a very strange state of mind."

The clock struck, and this reminder of the hour made him start, affecting his nerves rather than his consciousness. He awaited her with that impatience which delay increases from second to second. She was always prompt, so that in less than ten minutes he would see her enter. When the ten minutes had elapsed, he felt anxious, as at the approach of some sorrow, then irritated because she had made him lose time. Finally he realized that if she failed to come it would cause him actual suffering. What should he do? Should he wait for her? No; he would go out, so that if, by chance, she should arrive very late, she would find the studio empty.

He would go out, but when? What latitude should he allow her? Would it not be better to remain and to make her comprehend, by a few coldly polite words, that he was not one to be kept waiting? And suppose she did not come? Then he would receive a despatch, a card, a servant or a messenger. If she did not come, what should he do? It would be a day lost; he could not work. Then? Well, then he would go to seek some news of her, for see her he must!

It was quite true; he felt a profound, tormenting, harassing need of seeing her. What did it mean? Was it love? But he felt no mental exaltation, no intoxication of the senses; it awakened no perplexed anxiety when he realized that if she did not come that day he should suffer keenly.

The door-bell rang on the stairway of the little hôtel, and Olivier Bertin suddenly found himself short of breath, then so joyous that he executed a pirouette and flung his cigarette high in the air.

She entered alone. Immediately he became bold.

"Do you know what I asked myself while waiting for you?"

"No, indeed, I do not."

"I asked myself if I were not in love with you."

"In love with me? You must be mad!"

But she smiled and her smile said: That is very pretty; I am glad to hear it! However, she said: "You are not serious, of course. Why do you make such a jest?"

"On the contrary, I am absolutely serious," he replied. "I do not declare that I am in love with you, but I ask myself whether I am not well on the way to become so."

"What has made you think so?"

"My emotion when you are not here, my happiness when you arrive."

She seated herself.

"Oh, don't disturb yourself over anything so trifling! As long as you sleep well and have an appetite for dinner, there will be no danger!"

He began to laugh.

"And if I lose my sleep and no longer eat?"

"Let me know of it."

"And then?"

"I will allow you to recover yourself in peace."

"A thousand thanks!"

And on the theme of this uncertain love they spun theories and fancies all

the afternoon. The same thing occurred on several successive days. Accepting his statement as a sort of jest, of no real importance, she would say gaily on entering: "Well, how goes your love to-day?"

He would reply lightly, yet with perfect seriousness, telling her of the progress of his malady, in all its intimate details, and of the depth of the tenderness that had been born and was daily increasing. He analyzed himself minutely before her, hour by hour, since their separation the evening before, with the air of a professor giving a lecture, and she listened with interest, a little moved and somewhat disturbed by this story which seemed like a novel of which she was the heroine. When he had enumerated, in his gallant and easy manner, all the anxieties of which he had become the prey, his voice would sometimes tremble in expressing by a word, or only by an intonation, the aching of his heart.

And she persisted in questioning him, vibrating with curiosity, her eyes fixed upon him, her ear eager for those things that are disturbing to hear but charming to listen to.

Sometimes when he approached her to alter a pose he would seize her hand and try to kiss it. With a swift movement she would draw away her fingers from his lips, saying, with a slight frown:

"Come, come—work!"

He would begin his work again, but within five minutes she would ask some adroit question that led him back to the sole topic that interested them.

By this time she began to feel some fear deep in her heart. She longed to be loved—but not too much! Sure of not being led away, she yet feared to allow him to venture too far, thereby losing him, since then she would be compelled to drive him to despair after seeming to encourage him. Yet should it become necessary to renounce this tender and delicate friendship, this stream of pleasant converse which rippled along bearing nuggets of love like a river whose sand is full of gold, it would cause her great sorrow—a grief that would be heart-breaking.

When she set out from her own home to go to the painter's studio, a wave of joy, warm and penetrating, overflowed her spirit, making it light and happy. As she laid her hand on Olivier's bell, her breast throbbed with impatience, and the stair carpet seemed the softest her feet ever had pressed. But Bertin became gloomy, a little nervous, often irritable. He had his moments of impatience, soon repressed, but frequently recurring.

One day, when she had just entered, he sat down beside her instead of beginning to paint, saying:

"Madame, you can no longer ignore the fact that what I have said is not a jest, and that I love you madly."

Troubled at this beginning, and seeing that the dreaded crisis had arrived, she tried to stop him, but he listened to her no longer. Emotion overflowed his heart, and she had to listen to him, pale, trembling and anxious. He spoke a long time, demanding nothing, tenderly, sadly, with despairing resignation, and she allowed him to take her hands, which he kept in his. He was kneeling before her without her noticing his attitude, and with a far-away look upon his face, he begged her not to work him any harm. What harm? She did not un-

derstand nor try to understand, overcome by the cruel grief of seeing him suffer, though that grief was almost happiness. Suddenly she saw tears in his eyes and was so deeply moved that she exclaimed: "Oh!"—ready to embrace him as one embraces a crying child. He said very gently: "There, there! I suffer too much." Then suddenly, affected by his sorrow, by the contagion of tears, she sobbed, her nerves quivering, her arms trembling, ready to be extended.

When she felt herself suddenly clasped in his embrace she wished to cry out, to struggle, to repulse him, but it was in vain, for she consented while resisting; she yielded even while she struggled, pressing him to her as she cried: "No, no, I will not!"

Then, overcome with the emotion of that moment, she hid her face in her hands, and then suddenly springing to her feet, she caught up her hat, which had fallen to the floor, put it on her head and rushed away, in spite of the supplications of Olivier, who held her by the skirt.

As soon as she was in the street, she longed to sit down on the curbstone, her limbs were so exhausted and powerless. A cab was passing. She called it and said to the driver: "Drive slowly and take me wherever you like." She threw herself into the carriage, closed the door, sank back in one corner, feeling herself alone behind the raised windows—alone to think.

For some minutes she heard only the sound of the wheels and the jarring of the cab. She looked at the houses, the pedestrians, people in cabs and omnibuses with a blank gaze that saw nothing. She thought of nothing, as if she were giving herself time, granting herself a respite before daring to reflect upon what had happened.

Then, as she had a practical mind and was not lacking in courage, she said to herself: "I am lost!" For some time she remained under that feeling of certainty that irreparable misfortune had befallen her, horror-struck, like a man fallen from a roof, knowing that his legs are broken but dreading to verify his knowledge.

But, instead of feeling overwhelmed by the anticipation of suffering, her heart remained calm and peaceful after the catastrophe; it beat slowly, softly, after the fall that had terrified her soul, and seemed to take no part in the perturbation of her mind.

She repeated aloud, as if to understand and convince herself: "Yes, I am lost." No echo of suffering responded from her heart to this cry of her conscience.

She allowed herself to be soothed for some time by the movement of the carriage, putting off a little longer the necessity of facing this cruel situation. No, she did not suffer. She was afraid to think, that was all; she feared to know, to comprehend and to reflect. On the contrary, in that mysterious and impenetrable being created within us by the incessant struggle between our desires and our will, she felt an indescribable peace.

After perhaps half an hour of this strange repose, understanding at last that the despair she had invoked would not come, she shook off her torpor and murmured: "It is strange; I am hardly sorry even!"

Then she began to reproach herself. Anger awakened within her against her

own blindness and her weakness. How had she not foreseen this, not comprehended that the hour for that struggle must come; that this man was so dear to her as to render her cowardly, and that sometimes in the purest hearts desire arises like a gust of wind, carrying the will before it?

But, after she had judged and reprimanded herself severely, she asked herself what would happen next.

Her first resolve was to break with the painter and never to see him again. Hardly had she formed this resolution before a thousand reasons sprang up as quickly to combat it. How could she explain such a break? What should she say to her husband? Would not the suspected truth be whispered, then spread abroad?

Would it not be better, for the sake of appearances, to act, with Olivier Bertin himself, the hypocritical comedy of indifference and forgetfulness, to show him that she had effaced that moment from her memory and from her life?

But could she do it? Would she have the audacity to appear to recollect nothing, to assume a look of indignant astonishment in saying: "What would you with me?" to the man with whom she had actually shared that swift and ardent emotion?

She reflected a long time and decided that any other solution was impossible.

She would go to him courageously the next day and make him understand as soon as she could what she desired him to do. She must not use a word, an allusion, a look that could recall to him that moment of shame.

After he had suffered—for assuredly he would have his share of suffering, as a loyal and upright man—he would remain in future that which he had been up to the present.

As soon as this new resolution was formed, she gave her address to the coachman and returned home, profoundly depressed, with a desire to take to her bed, to see no one, to sleep and forget. Having shut herself in her room, she remained there until the dinner hour, lying on a couch, benumbed, not wishing to agitate herself longer with that thought so full of danger.

She descended at the exact hour, astonished to find herself so calm, and awaited her husband with her ordinary demeanor. He appeared, carrying their little one in his arms; she pressed his hand and kissed the child and felt no pang of anguish.

Monsieur de Guilleroy inquired what she had been doing. She replied indifferently that she had been posing as usual.

"And the portrait—is it good?" he asked.

"It is coming on very well."

He spoke of his own affairs in his turn. He enjoyed talking, while dining, of the sitting of the Chamber and of the discussion of the proposed law on the adulteration of foodstuffs.

This rather tiresome talk, which she usually endured amiably, now irritated her and made her look with closer attention at the man who was vulgarly loquacious in his interest in such things, but she smiled as she listened and replied pleasantly, more gracious even than usual, more indulgent toward these commonplaces. As she looked at him she thought: "I have deceived him! He is my husband and I have

deceived him! How strange it is! Nothing can change that fact, nothing can obliterate it! I closed my eyes. I submitted for a few seconds, a few seconds only, to a man's kisses, and I am no longer a virtuous woman. A few seconds in my life—seconds that never can be effaced—have brought into it that little irreparable fact, so grave, so short, a crime, the most shameful one for a woman—and yet I feel no despair! If any one had told me that yesterday, I should not have believed it. If any one had convinced me that it would indeed come to pass, I should have thought instantly of the terrible remorse that would fill my heart to-day."

Monsieur de Guilleroy went out after dinner, as he did almost every evening. Then the countess took her little daughter on her lap, weeping over her and kissing her. The tears she shed were sincere, coming from her conscience, not from her heart.

But she slept very little. Amid the darkness of her room she tormented herself afresh as to the dangers of the attitude toward the painter that she purposed to assume. She dreaded the interview that must take place the following day and the things that he must say to her, looking her in the face meanwhile.

She rose early, but remained lying on her couch all the morning, forcing herself to foresee what it was she had to fear and what she must say in reply, in order to be ready for any surprise.

She went out early, so that she might have time to think while walking.

He hardly expected her and had been asking himself, since the evening before, what he should do when he met her.

After her hasty departure—that flight which he had not dared to oppose—he had remained alone, still listening, although she was already far away, for the sound of her step, the rustle of her skirt and the closing of the door, touched by a timid hand.

He remained standing, full of deep, ardent, intoxicating joy. He had won her, *her!* That had passed between them! Was it possible? After the surprise of this triumph, he gloated over it, and to realize it more keenly, he sat down, almost reclining on the divan where she had lately sat.

He remained there a long time, full of the thought that she was his mistress and that between them, between the woman he had so much desired and himself, a few moments had tied that mysterious bond which secretly links two beings to each other. He retained in his still quivering body the piercingly sweet remembrance of that wild, fleeting moment when their lips had met, thrilled with the deepest emotion of life.

He did not go out that evening, in order to live over again that rapturous moment. He retired early, his heart vibrating with happiness. He had hardly awakened the next morning before he asked himself what he should do. To a *cocotte* or an ordinary woman he would have sent flowers or even a jewel, but he was tortured with perplexity in this new situation.

He wished to express, in delicate and charming terms, the gratitude of his soul, his ecstasy of mad tenderness, his offer of a lifelong devotion, but he could find only set phrases, commonplace, vulgar and puerile expressions to set forth the tender, passionate things

he longed to say.

Assuredly he must write—but what? He scribbled, erased, tore up and began anew twenty letters, all of which seemed to him insulting, odious, ridiculous.

He gave up the idea of writing, therefore, and decided to go to see her, as soon as the hour for the sitting had passed, for he felt very sure that she would not come.

Shutting himself up in his studio, he became enthusiastic over the portrait, his lips longing to press themselves on the painting, whereon something of herself was fixed; and again and again he looked out of the window into the street. Every gown he saw in the distance made his heart throb quickly. Twenty times he believed that he saw her; then when the approaching woman had passed he sat down again, overcome as by a deception.

Suddenly he saw her, doubted, then took his opera glass, recognized her, and, dizzy with violent emotion, sat down once more to await her.

When she entered he threw himself on his knees, and tried to take her hands, but she drew them away abruptly, and as he remained at her feet, filled with anguish, his eyes raised to hers, she said haughtily:

"What are you doing, monsieur? I do not understand that attitude."

"Oh, madame, I entreat you——"

She interrupted him harshly:

"Get up! You are ridiculous!"

He rose, dazed, and murmured:

"What is the matter? Do not treat me in this way—I love you!"

Then, in a few short, dry phrases, she intimated her wishes and laid down the law.

"I do not understand what you mean. Never speak to me of your love or I shall leave this studio never to return. If you forget for a single moment this condition of my presence here, you never will see me again."

He looked at her, crushed by this unexpected harshness. Then he understood and murmured:

"I will obey, madame."

"Very well," she rejoined; "I expected that of you! Now work, for you are slow in finishing that portrait."

He took up his palette and began to paint, but his hand trembled, his troubled eyes looked without seeing; he felt a desire to weep, so deeply wounded was his heart.

He tried to talk to her; she barely answered him. When he attempted to pay her some little compliment on her complexion, she cut him short in a tone so brusque that he felt suddenly one of those furies of a lover that change tenderness to hatred. Through soul and body he felt a nervous shock, and in a moment he detested her. Yes, yes, that was just like a woman! She was like all the rest! Why not? She, too, was false, changeable and weak, like all of them. She had attracted him, seduced him with girlish ruses, trying to overcome him without intending to give him anything in return, enticing him only to refuse him, employing toward him all the tricks of cowardly coquettes who seem always on the point of yielding so long as the man who cringes like a dog before them dares not carry out his desire.

But the situation was worse for her, after all. He had held her in his arms, kissed her. She might try to wash away that fact and answer him insolently. She could efface nothing, and he—he

would forget it! Indeed, it would have been a fine bit of folly to entangle himself with any one who would eat into his artist life with the capricious teeth of a pretty woman.

He felt a desire to whistle, as he did in the presence of his models, but realized that his nerve was giving way and feared to commit some stupidity. He cut short the sitting under pretense of having an appointment. When they bowed at parting they felt themselves farther apart than the day they first met at the Duchesse de Mortemain's.

As soon as she had gone, he took his hat and topcoat and went out. A cold sun in a misty blue sky threw over the city a pale, depressing, unreal light.

After he had walked a long time, with rapid and irritated step, elbowing the passers-by so as not to deviate from a straight line, his great fury against her began to change into sadness and regret. After he had repeated to himself all the reproaches he had poured upon her, he remembered, as he looked at the women that passed him, how pretty and charming she was. Like many others who do not admit it, he had always been waiting to meet the "impossible she," to find the rare, unique, poetic and passionate being, the dream of whom hovers over our hearts. Had he not almost found it? Was it not she who might have given him this almost impossible happiness? Why is it that nothing comes true? Why can one never seize what one is pursuing or can succeed only in grasping a phantom, which renders still more grievous this pursuit of illusions?

He was no longer resentful toward her; it was toward life that he was bitter. Now that he was able to reason, he asked himself what cause for anger he had against her. What could he reproach her with, after all?—with being amiable, kind and gracious toward him; while she, for her part, might well reproach him for having behaved like a villain!

He returned home full of sadness. He would have liked to ask her pardon, to devote himself to her, to make her forget; and he pondered as to how he might enable her to comprehend that henceforth, until death, he would be obedient to all her wishes.

The next day she arrived, accompanied by her daughter, with a smile so sad, an expression so pathetic, that the painter fancied he could see in those poor blue eyes, that had always been so merry, all the pain, all the remorse, all the desolation of that womanly heart. He was moved to pity, and, in order that she might forget, he showed her, with delicate reserve, the most thoughtful attentions. She acknowledged them with gentleness and kindness, with the weary and languid manner of a woman who suffers.

And looking at her, seized again with a mad dream of loving and of being loved, he asked himself why she was not more indignant at his conduct, how she could still come to his studio, listen to him and answer him, with that memory between them.

Since she could bear to see him again, however, could endure to hear his voice, having always in her mind the one thought which she could not escape, it must be that this thought had not become intolerable to her. When a woman hates the man who has conquered her thus, she cannot remain in his presence without showing her hatred, but that man never can remain wholly

indifferent to her. She must either detest him or pardon him. And when she pardons that transgression, she is not far from love!

While he painted slowly, he arrived at this conclusion by small arguments, precise, clear and sure; he now felt himself strong, steady, and master of the situation. He had only to be prudent, patient, devoted, and one day or another she would relent.

He knew how to wait. In order to reassure her and to conquer her once more, he practiced ruses in his turn; he assumed a tenderness restrained by apparent remorse, hesitating attentions, and indifferent attitudes. Tranquil in the certainty of approaching happiness, what did it matter whether it arrived a little sooner, a little later? He even experienced a strange, subtle pleasure in delay, in watching her, and saying to himself, "She is afraid!" as he saw her coming always with her child.

He felt that between them a slow work of reconciliation was going on, and thought that in the countess' eyes was something strange: constraint, a sweet sadness, that appeal of a struggling soul, of a faltering will, which seems to say: "But—conquer me, then!"

After awhile she came alone once more, reassured by his reserve. Then he treated her as a friend, a comrade; he talked to her of his life, his plans, his art, as to a brother.

Deluded by this attitude, she assumed joyfully the part of counselor, flattered that he distinguished her thus above other women, and convinced that his talent would gain in delicacy through this intellectual intimacy. But, from consulting her and showing deference to her, he caused her to pass naturally from the functions of a counselor to the sacred office of inspirer. She found it charming to use her influence thus over the great man, and almost consented that he should love her as an artist, since it was she that gave him inspiration for his work!

It was one evening, after a long talk about the loves of illustrious painters, that she let herself glide into his arms.

She felt no remorse now, only the vague consciousness of a fall; and to stifle the reproaches of her reason she attributed it to fatality.

Drawn toward him by her virgin heart and her empty soul, the flesh overcome by the slow domination of caresses, little by little she attached herself to him, as do all tender women who love for the first time.

With Olivier it was a crisis of acute love, sensuous and poetic. It seemed to him sometimes that one day he had taken flight, with hands extended, and that he had been able to clasp in full embrace that winged and magnificent dream which is always hovering over our hopes.

He had finished the countess' portrait, the best, certainly, that he ever had painted, for he had discovered and crystallized that inexpressible something which a painter seldom succeeds in unveiling—that reflection, that mystery, that physiognomy of the soul, which passes intangibly across a face.

Months rolled by, then years, which hardly loosened the tie that united the Comtesse de Guilleroy and the painter, Olivier Bertin. With him it was no longer the exaltation of the beginning, but a calm, deep affection, a sort of loving friendship that had become a habit.

With her, on the contrary, the passionate, persistent attachment of certain women who give themselves to a man wholly and forever was always growing. They have bound their lives resolutely, as one who knows how to swim, yet wishing to die, ties his hands together before leaping from a high bridge into the water.

But from the moment when the countess had yielded, she was assailed by fears for Bertin's constancy. Nothing held him but his masculine will, his caprice, his passing fancy for a woman he had met one day just as he had already met so many others! She realized that he was so free, so susceptible to temptation—he who lived without duties, habits, or scruples, like all men! He was handsome, celebrated, much sought after, having within the scope of his easily awakened desires, fashionable women, whose modesty is so fragile, women of the demi-monde, or the theatre, prodigal of their favors with such men as he. One of them, some evening after supper, might follow him and, being agreeable to him, might take him and keep him.

Thus she lived in terror of losing him, watching his manner, his attitudes, startled by a word, full of anguish when he admired another woman, praised the charm of her countenance or her grace of bearing. All that she was ignorant of in his life made her tremble. At each of their meetings she questioned him ingeniously, without his perceiving it, in order to make him express his opinion of the people he had seen, the houses where he had dined, in short, the lightest expression of his mind. As soon as she fancied she detected the influence of some other person, she tried to counteract it with great astuteness and innumerable resources.

Oh, how often did she suspect those brief intrigues, without depth, lasting perhaps a week or two, from time to time, which come into the life of every prominent artist!

She had, as it were, an intuition of danger, even before she detected the awakening of a new desire in Olivier, by the look of triumph in his eyes, the expression of a man when swayed by a gallant fancy.

Then she would suffer; her sleep would be tortured by doubts. In order to surprise him, she would appear suddenly in his studio, without giving him notice of her coming, ask apparently innocent questions, test his tenderness while listening to his words as we palpate a body to detect symptoms of disease. Then she would weep as soon as she found herself alone, sure that someone would take him from her this time, robbing her of that love to which she clung so passionately because she had staked upon it all her will, all her strength of affection, all her hopes and dreams.

And when she saw that he came back to her, after these brief diversions, she experienced, as she drew close to him again, took possession of him as of something lost and recovered again, a deep, silent happiness which sometimes, when she passed a church, urged her to go in and thank God.

Her constant effort to make herself more attractive than anyone else and to hold him in spite of others, had made her whole life an uninterrupted series of coquetry. She had ceaselessly struggled for him, and before him, with her grace, her beauty and elegance. She

wished that wherever he went he should hear her praised for her charm, her taste, her wit, and her toilets. She wished to please others for his sake, and to attract them so that he should be both proud and jealous of her. And every time that she succeeded in arousing his jealousy, after making him suffer a little, she allowed him the triumph of winning her back, which revived his love by exciting his vanity. Then, realizing that it was always possible for a man to meet in society a woman whose physical charm would be greater than her own, being a novelty, she resorted to other means: she flattered and spoiled him. Discreetly, but continuously, she heaped praises upon him in flattery, so that he might find all other friendship, all other love, even, a little cold and incomplete, and that if others also loved him he would perceive at last that she alone understood him.

She made the two drawing-rooms in her house, which he entered so often, a place as attractive to the pride of the artist as to the heart of the man, the place in all Paris where he liked best to come, because there all his cravings were satisfied at the same time.

Not only did she learn to discover all his tastes, in order that, while gratifying them in her own house, she might give him a feeling of well-being that nothing could replace, but she knew how to create new tastes, to arouse appetites of all kinds, material and intellectual, habits of little attentions, of affection, of adoration and flattery! She tried to charm his eye with elegance, his sense of smell with perfumes, and his taste with delicate food.

But when she had planted in the soul and in the senses of a selfish bachelor a multitude of petty, tyrannical needs, when she had become quite certain that no one else would trouble herself as she did to watch over and maintain them, in order to surround him with all the little pleasures of life, she suddenly feared, as she saw him disgusted with his own home, always complaining of his solitary life, and, being unable to come into her home except under all the restraints imposed by society, going to the club, seeking every means to soften his lonely lot—she feared lest he should think of marriage.

On some days she suffered so much from all these anxieties that she longed for old age, to put an end to this anguish, that she might be at ease in a cooler and calmer affection.

Years passed, however, without disuniting them. The chain wherewith she had attached him to her was heavy, and she made new links as the old ones wore away. But, always solicitous, she watched over the painter's heart as one guards a child crossing a street full of vehicles, and day by day she lived in expectation of the unknown danger, the dread of which always hung over her.

The count, without suspicion or jealousy, found this intimacy of his wife with a famous and popular artist a perfectly natural thing. Through continually meeting, the two men, becoming accustomed to each other, finally became excellent friends.

CHAPTER II

TWIN ROSES FROM A SINGLE STEM

On Friday evening when Bertin entered the house of his friend, where he was to dine in honor of the return of Antoinette de Guilleroy, he found in the little Louis XV salon only Monsieur de Musadieu, who had just arrived.

He was a clever old man, who might have made a name for himself, and who now could not console himself for not having done so.

He had once been a commissioner of the imperial museum, and had found means to get himself reappointed Inspector of Fine Arts under the Republic, which did not prevent him from being, above all else, the friend of princes, of all the princes, princesses and duchesses of European aristocracy, and the sworn protector of artists of all sorts. He was endowed with an alert mind and excellent judgment, with great facility of speech that enabled him to say agreeably the most ordinary things, with a suppleness of thought that put him at ease in any society, and a subtle diplomatic perception that gave him the power to estimate men at first sight; and he strolled from salon to salon, morning and evening, with his enlightened, useless and gossiping activity.

Apt at everything, as he appeared, he would talk on any subject with an air of convincing competence and familiarity that made him greatly appreciated by fashionable women, whom he served as a sort of travelling encyclopedia of erudition. As a matter of fact, he knew many things without ever having read any but the most indispensable books; but he stood very well with the five Academies, with all the *savants,* writers, and learned specialists, to whom he listened with clever discernment. He knew how to forget at once explanations that were too technical or were useless to him, remembered the others very well, and gave forth the information thus gleaned in an easy, clear, and good-natured manner, that made it as readily comprehensible as the popular presentation of scientific facts. He gave the impression of being a veritable storehouse of ideas, one of those vast places wherein one never finds rare objects but discovers a multiplicity of cheap productions of all kinds, and from all sources, from household utensils to the popular instruments for physical culture or for domestic surgery.

The painters, with whom his official functions brought him in continual contact, made sport of him, but feared him. He rendered them some services, however, helped them to sell pictures, brought them in contact with fashionable persons, and enjoyed introducing them, protecting them, launching them. He seemed to devote himself to a mysterious function of blending the fashionable and the artistic worlds, pluming himself on his intimate acquaintance with the former, and of his familiar footing with the latter, on breakfasting with the Prince of Wales on his way through Paris, or dining, the same evening, with Paul Adelmant, Olivier Bertin and Amaury Maldant.

Bertin, who liked him well enough, found him amusing, and said of him: "He is the encyclopedia of Jules Verne, bound in asses' skin!"

The two men shook hands and began to talk of the political situation and the rumors of war, which Musadieu thought alarming, for evident reasons which he explained very well, Germany having every interest in crushing us and in hastening that moment for which M. de Bismarck had been waiting eighteen years; while Olivier Bertin proved by irrefutable argument that these fears were chimerical, it being impossible for Germany to be foolish enough to risk her conquest in an always doubtful venture, or for the Chancellor to be imprudent enough to risk, in the latter years of his life, his achievements and his glory at a single blow.

M. de Musadieu, however, seemed to know something of which he did not wish to speak. Furthermore, he had seen a minister that morning and had met the Grand Duke Vladimir, returning from Cannes, the evening before.

The artist was unconvinced by this, and with quick irony expressed doubt of the knowledge of even the best informed. Behind all these rumors was the influence of the Bourse! Bismarck alone might have a settled opinion on the subject.

M. de Guilleroy entered, shook hands warmly, excusing himself in unctuous words for having left them alone.

"And you, my dear deputy," asked the painter, "what do you think of these rumors of war?"

M. de Guilleroy launched into a discourse. As a member of the Chamber, he knew more of the subject than anyone else, though he held an opinion differing from that of most of his colleagues. No, he did not believe in the probability of an approaching conflict, unless it should be provoked by French turbulence and by the rodomontades of the self-styled patriots of the League. And he painted Bismarck's portrait in striking colors, a portrait *à la* Saint-Simon. The man Bismarck was one that no one wished to understand, because one always lends to others his own ways of thinking, and credits them with a readiness to do that which he would do were he placed in their situation. M. de Bismarck was not a false and lying diplomatist, but brutally frank, always loudly proclaiming the truth and announcing his intentions. "I want peace!" said he. That was true; he wanted peace, nothing but peace, and everything had proved it in a dazzling fashion for eighteen years; everything —his armaments, his alliances, that union of peoples banded together against our impetuosity. M. de Guilleroy concluded in a tone of profound conviction: "He is a great man, a very great man who desires peace, but who has faith only in menaces and violent means as the way to obtain it. In short, gentlemen, a great barbarian."

"He that wishes the end to justify the means," M. de Musadieu replied. "I will grant you willingly that he adores peace if you will concede to me that he always wishes to make war in order to obtain it. But that is an indisputable and phenomenal truth: in this world war is made only to obtain peace!"

A servant announced: "Madame la Duchesse de Mortemain."

Between the folding-doors appeared a tall, large woman, who entered with

an air of authority.

Guilleroy hastened to meet her, and kissed her hand, saying:

"How do you do, duchess?"

The other two men saluted her with a certain distinguished familiarity, for the duchess' manner was both cordial and abrupt.

She was the widow of a general, the Duc de Mortemain, mother of an only daughter married to the Prince de Salia; daughter of the Marquis de Farandal, of high family and royally rich, and received at her mansion in the Rue de Varenne all the celebrities of the world, who met and complimented one another there. No highness passed through Paris without dining at her table; no man could attract public attention that she did not immediately wish to know him. She must see him, make him talk to her, form her own judgment of him. This amused her greatly, lent interest to life, and fed the flame of imperious yet kindly curiosity that burned within her.

She had hardly seated herself when the same servant announced:

"Monsieur le Baron and Madame la Baronne de Corbelle."

They were young: the baron was bald and fat, the baroness was slender, elegant, and very dark.

This couple occupied a peculiar situation in the French aristocracy due solely to a scrupulous choice of connections. Belonging to the inferior nobility, but without worth or talent, the motive of all their actions being an immoderate love of that which is select, correct and distinguished, they had by dint of visiting only the most princely houses, of professing their royalist sentiments, pious and correct to a supreme degree; of respecting all that should be respected, of condemning all that should be condemned, never being mistaken on a point of worldly dogma or hesitating over a detail of etiquette, succeeded in passing in the eyes of many for the finest flower of high life. Their opinion formed a sort of code of correct form, and their presence in a house gave it a true title of distinction.

The Corbelles were relatives of the Comte de Guilleroy.

"Well," said the duchess in astonishment, "and your wife?"

"One instant, one little instant," pleaded the count. "There is a surprise: she is just about to come."

When Madame de Guilleroy, as the bride of a month, had entered society, she was presented to the Duchesse de Mortemain, who loved her immediately, adopted her, and patronized her.

For twenty years this friendship never had diminished, and when the duchess said *"Ma petite,"* one still heard in her voice the tenderness of that sudden and persistent affection. It was at her house that the painter and the countess had happened to meet.

Musadieu approached the group. "Has the duchess been to see the exposition of the Intemperates?" he inquired.

"No; what is that?"

"A group of new artists, impressionists in a state of intoxication. Two of them are very fine."

The great lady murmured, with disdain: "I do not like the jests of those gentlemen."

Authoritative, brusque, barely tolerating any other opinion than her own, and founding hers solely on the consciousness of her social station, con-

sidering, without being able to give a good reason for it, that artists and learned men were merely intelligent mercenaries charged by God to amuse society or to render service to it, she had no other basis for her criticisms than the degree of astonishment or of pleasure she experienced at the sight of a thing, the reading of a book, or the account of a discovery.

Tall, stout, heavy, red, with a loud voice, she passed as having the air of a great lady because nothing embarrassed her; she dared to say anything and patronized the whole world, dethroned princes, with her receptions in their honor, and even the Almighty by her generosity to the clergy and her gifts to the churches.

"Does the duchess know," Musadieu continued, "that they say the assassin of Marie Lambourg has been arrested?"

Her interest was awakened at once.

"No, tell me about it," she replied.

He narrated the details. Musadieu was tall and very thin; he wore a white waistcoat and little diamond shirt-studs; he spoke without gestures, with a correct air which allowed him to say the daring things which he took delight in uttering. He was very near-sighted, and appeared, notwithstanding his eye-glass, never to see anyone; and when he sat down his whole frame seemed to accommodate itself to the shape of the chair. His figure seemed to shrink into folds, as if his spinal column were made of rubber; his legs, crossed one over the other, looked like two rolled ribbons, and his long arms, resting on the arms of the chair, allowed his pale hands with interminable fingers to droop. His hair and mustache, artistically dyed, with a few white locks cleverly forgotten, were a subject of frequent jests.

While he was explaining to the duchess that the jewels of the murdered prostitute had been given as a present by the suspected murderer to another girl of the same stamp, the door of the large drawing-room opened wide once more, and two blonde women in white lace, a creamy Mechlin, resembling each other as might two sisters of different ages, the one a little mature, the other a little too young, one a trifle too plump, the other a shade too slender, advanced, clasping each other round the waist and smiling.

The guests exclaimed and applauded. No one, except Olivier Bertin, knew of Annette de Guilleroy's return, and the appearance of the young girl beside her mother, who at a little distance seemed almost as fresh and even more beautiful—for, like a flower in full bloom, she had not ceased to be brilliant, while the child, hardly budding, was only beginning to be pretty—made both appear charming.

The duchess, delighted, clapped her hands, exclaiming: "Heavens! How charming and amusing they are, standing beside each other! Look, Monsieur de Musadieu, how much they resemble each other!"

The two were compared, and two opinions were formed. According to Musadieu, the Corbelles, and the Comte de Guilleroy, the countess and her daughter resembled each other only in coloring, in their hair, and above all in their eyes, which were exactly alike, both showing tiny black dots, like minute drops of ink, on the blue iris. But it was their opinion that when the young girl became a woman, they would no longer resemble each other.

According to the duchess, on the contrary, and also Olivier Bertin, they were similar in all respects, and only the difference in age made them appear unlike.

"How she has changed in three years!" said the painter. "I should not have recognized her, and I shall no longer dare to *tutoyer* the young lady!"

The countess laughed. "The idea! I should like to hear you say 'you' to Annette!"

The young girl, whose future gay audacity was already apparent under an air of timid playfulness, replied: "It is I who shall not dare to say 'thou' to Monsieur Bertin."

Her mother smiled.

"Yes, continue the old habit—I will allow you to do so," she said. "You will soon renew your acquaintance with him."

But Annette shook her head.

"No, no, it would embarrass me," she said.

The duchess embraced her, and examined her with all the interest of a connoisseur.

"Look me in the face, my child," she said. "Yes, you have exactly the same expression as your mother; you won't be so bad by and by, when you have acquired more polish. And you must grow a bit plumper—not very much, but a little. You are very thin."

"Oh, don't say that!" exclaimed the countess.

"Why not?"

"It is so nice to be slender. I intend to reduce myself at once."

But Madame de Mortemain took offense, forgetting in her anger the presence of a young girl.

"Oh, of course, you are all in favor of bones, because you can dress them better than flesh. For my part, I belong to the generation of fat women! To-day is the day of thin ones. They make me think of the lean kine of Egypt. I cannot understand how men can admire your skeletons. In my time they demanded more!"

She subsided amid the smiles of the company, but added, turning to Annette:

"Look at your mamma, little one; she does very well; she has attained the happy medium—imitate her."

They passed into the dining-room. After they were seated, Musadieu resumed the discussion.

"For my part, I say that men should be thin, because they are formed for exercises that require address and agility, incompatible with corpulency. But the women's case is a little different. Don't you think so, Corbelle?"

Corbelle was perplexed, the duchess being stout and his own wife more than slender. But the baroness came to the rescue of her husband, and resolutely declared herself in favor of slimness. The year before that, she declared, she had been obliged to struggle with the beginning of *embonpoint*, over which she soon triumphed.

"Tell us how you did it," demanded Madame de Guilleroy.

The baroness explained the method employed by all the fashionable women of the day. One must never drink while eating; but an hour after the repast a cup of tea might be taken, boiling hot. This method succeeded with everyone. She cited astonishing cases of fat women who in three months had become more slender than the blade of a knife. The duchess exclaimed in ex-

asperation:

"Good gracious, how stupid to torture oneself like that! You like nothing any more—nothing—not even champagne. Bertin, as an artist, what do you think of this folly?"

"*Mon Dieu,* madame, I am a painter and I simply arrange the drapery, so it is all the same to me. If I were a sculptor I might complain."

"But as a man, which do you prefer?"

"I? Oh—a certain rounded slimness—what my cook calls a nice little corn-fed chicken. It is not fat, but plump and delicate."

The comparison caused a laugh; but the incredulous countess looked at her daughter and murmured:

"No, it is very much better to be thin; slender women never grow old."

This point also was discussed by the company; and all agreed that a very fat person should not grow thin too rapidly.

This observation gave place to a review of women known in society and to new discussions on their grace, their *chic* and beauty. Musadieu pronounced the blonde Marquise de Lochrist incomparably charming, while Bertin esteemed as a beauty Madame Mandelière, with her brunette complexion, low brow, her dusky eyes and somewhat large mouth, in which her teeth seemed to sparkle.

He was seated beside the young girl, and said suddenly, turning to her:

"Listen to me, Nanette. Everything that we have just been saying you will hear repeated at least once a week until you are old. In a week you will know all that society thinks about politics, women, plays, and all the rest of it. Only an occasional change of names will be necessary—names of persons and titles of works. When you have heard us all express and defend our opinions, you will quietly choose your own among those that one must have, and then you need never trouble yourself to think of anything more, never. You will only have to rest."

The young girl, without replying, turned upon him her mischievous eyes, wherein sparkled youthful intelligence, restrained, but ready to escape.

But the duchess and Musadieu, who played with ideas as one tosses a ball, without perceiving that they continually exchanged the same ones, protested in the name of thought and of human activity.

Then Bertin attempted to show how the intelligence of fashionable people, even the brightest of them, is without value, foundation, or weight; how slight is the basis of their beliefs, how feeble and indifferent is their interest in intellectual things, how fickle and questionable are their tastes.

Carried away by one of those spasms of indignation, half real, half assumed, aroused at first by a desire to be eloquent, and urged on by the sudden prompting of a clear judgment, ordinarily obscured by an easy-going nature, he showed how those persons whose sole occupation in life is to pay visits and dine in town find themselves becoming, by an irresistible fatality, light and graceful but utterly trivial beings, vaguely agitated by superficial cares, beliefs and appetites.

He showed that there is no depth, ardor, or sincerity among them; that, possessing no intellectual culture and a mere veneer of information, they remain, in fact, manikins who produce the effect and make the gestures of the en-

lightened beings that they are not. He proved that, the frail roots of their instincts having been nourished on conventionalities instead of realities, they love nothing sincerely, that even the luxury of their existence is a satisfaction of vanity and not the gratification of a refined bodily necessity, for usually their table is indifferent, their wines, which are expensive, are bad.

They live, he said, on the outside of everything without seeing or understanding anything; outside of science, of which they are ignorant; outside of nature, at which they do not know how to look; outside of true happiness, for they are powerless to enjoy it; outside of the beauty of the world and the beauty of art, of which they chatter without having really discovered it, or even believing in it, for they are ignorant of the intoxication of tasting the joys of life and of the intellect. They are incapable of attaching themselves to any one thing up to the point of loving that alone, of interesting themselves in anything to that degree that existence is illumined by the happiness of comprehending it.

The Baron de Corbelle thought that it was his duty to come to the defence of society. This he did with inconsistent and irrefutable arguments, which melt before reason as snow before the fire, yet which cannot be disproved—the absurd and triumphant arguments of a country curate who would demonstrate the existence of God. In concluding, he compared fashionable people to race-horses, which, in truth, are good for nothing, but which are the glory of the equine race.

Bertin, irritated by this adversary, preserved a politely disdainful silence. But all at once the baron's imbecilities exasperated him, and, interrupting him adroitly, he recounted the life of a man of fashion from his rising to his going to rest, without omitting anything. All the details, cleverly described, made up an irresistibly amusing silhouette. One could see the fine gentleman dressed by his valet, first expressing a few general ideas to the hairdresser that came to shave him; then, when taking his morning stroll, inquiring of the grooms about the health of the horses; then trotting through the avenues of the Bois, caring only about bowing to acquaintances and being greeted in turn; then breakfasting opposite his wife, who for her part, had been out in her coupé, speaking to her only to enumerate the names of the persons he had met that morning; then passing from drawing-room to drawing-room until evening, refreshing his intelligence by contact with others of his circle, dining at the house of a prince, where the affairs of Europe were discussed, and finishing the evening behind the scenes at the Opéra, where his timid pretensions at being a man of the world were innocently satisfied by the appearance of being surrounded by naughtiness.

The picture was so true, without its satire wounding no one present, that laughter ran round the table.

The duchess, shaking with the suppressed merriment of fat persons, relieved herself by discreet chuckles.

"Really, you are too funny!" she said at last; "you will make me die of laughter."

Bertin replied, with some excitement:

"Oh, madame, in the polite world one does not die of laughter! One hardly laughs, even. We have the ami-

ability, as a matter of good taste, to pretend to be amused and to pretend to laugh. The grimace is imitated well enough, but the real thing is never done. Go to the theatres of the common people—there you will see laughter. Go among the *bourgeoisie,* when they are amusing themselves; you will see them laugh to suffocation. Go to the soldiers' quarters, you will see men choking, their eyes full of tears, doubled up on their beds over the jokes of some funny fellow. But in our drawing-rooms we never laugh. I tell you that we simulate everything, even laughter."

Musadieu interrupted him:

"Permit me to say that you are very severe. It seems to me that you yourself, my dear fellow, do not wholly despise this society at which you rail so bitterly."

Bertin smiled.

"I? I love it!" he declared.

"Well, then——?"

"I despise myself a little, as a mongrel of doubtful race."

"All that sort of talk is nothing but a pose," said the duchess.

And, as he denied having any intention of posing, she cut short the discussion by declaring that all artists try to make people believe that chalk is cheese.

The conversation then became general, touching upon everything, in a light and flippant, friendly and discreet manner, and, as the dinner was drawing to a close, the countess suddenly exclaimed, pointing to the full glasses of wine ranged before her:

"Well, you see that I have drunk nothing, nothing, not a drop! We shall see whether I grow thin!"

The duchess, furious, tried to make her swallow some mineral water, but in vain; then she exclaimed:

"Oh, the little simpleton! That daughter of hers will turn her head. I beg of you, Guilleroy, prevent your wife from committing this folly."

The count, who was explaining to Musadieu the system of a threshing-machine invented in America, had not been listening.

"What folly, duchess?"

"The folly of wishing to grow thin."

The count looked at his wife with an expression of kindly indifference.

"I never have formed the habit of opposing her," he replied.

The countess had risen, taking the arm of her neighbor; the count offered his to the duchess, and they passed into the large drawing-room, the boudoir at the end being reserved for use in the daytime.

It was an immense, well lighted room. On the four walls the large and beautiful panels of pale blue silk, of antique pattern, framed in white and gold, took on under the light of the lamps and the chandelier a moonlight softness and brightness. In the centre of the principal one, the portrait of the countess by Olivier Bertin seemed to inhabit, to animate the apartment. It had a look of being at home there, mingling with the air of the salon its youthful smile, the grace of its pose, the bright charm of its golden hair. It had become almost a custom, a sort of polite ceremony, like making the sign of the cross on entering a church, to compliment the model on the work of the painter whenever anyone stood before it.

Musadieu never failed to do this. His opinion as a connoisseur commissioned by the state having the value of that

of an official expert, he regarded it as his duty to affirm often, with conviction, the superiority of that painting.

"Truly," said he, "that is the most beautiful modern portrait I know. There is prodigious life in it."

The Count de Guilleroy, who, through hearing this portrait continually praised, had acquired a rooted conviction that he possessed a masterpiece, approached to add his praise, and for a minute or two they lavished upon the portrait all the art technicalities of the day in praise of the apparent qualities of the work, and also of those that were suggested.

All eyes were turned toward the portrait, apparently in a rapture of admiration, and Olivier Bertin, accustomed to these eulogies, to which he paid hardly more attention than to questions about his health when meeting some one in the street, nevertheless adjusted the reflector lamp placed before the portrait in order to illume it, the servant having carelessly set it a little on one side.

Then they seated themselves, and as the count approached the duchess, she said to him:

"I believe that my nephew is coming here for me, and also to ask you for a cup of tea."

For some time there had been a mutual understanding between them, so that their wishes coincided without being expressed; even by a hint.

The Marquis de Farandal, who was the brother of the Duchesse de Mortemain, after almost ruining himself at the gaming table, had died of the effects of a fall from his horse, leaving a widow and a son. This young man, now nearly twenty-eight years of age, was one of the most popular leaders of the cotillon in Europe, for he was sometimes requested to go to Vienna or to London to dance the waltz at some princely ball. Although possessing very small means, he remained, through his social station, his family, his name, and his almost royal connections, one of the most popular and envied men in Paris.

It was necessary to give a solid foundation to this convivial, dancing glory of his youth, and after a rich, a very rich marriage, to replace social triumphs by political success. As soon as the marquis became a deputy, he would become also, by that fact alone, one of the props of the future throne, one of the counselors of the king, one of the leaders of the party.

The duchess, who was well informed, knew the amount of the enormous fortune of the Comte de Guilleroy, a prudent hoarder of money, who lived in a simple apartment when he was quite able to live like a great lord in one of the handsomest mansions of Paris. She knew about his invariably successful speculations, his subtle judgment as a financier, his share in the most fruitful schemes of the past ten years, and she had cherished the idea of marrying her nephew to the daughter of the Norman deputy, to whom this marriage would give overwhelming influence in the aristocratic society of the princely circle. Guilleroy, who had made a rich marriage, and had thereby increased a large personal fortune, now nursed other ambitions.

He had faith in the return of the king, and wished, when that event should come, to be so situated as to derive from it the largest personal profit.

As a simple deputy, he did not cut a prominent figure. As the father-in-law

of the Marquis of Farandal, whose ancestors had been the faithful and chosen familiars of the royal house of France, he might rise to the first rank.

The friendship of the duchess for his wife lent to this union an element of intimacy that was very precious; and, for fear some other young girl might appear who would please the marquis, he had brought about the return of his own daughter in order to hasten events.

Madame de Mortemain, foreseeing and divining his plans, lent him her silent complicity; and on that very day, although she had not been informed of the sudden return of the young girl, she had made an appointment with her nephew to meet her at the Guilleroys, so that he might gradually become accustomed to visit that house frequently.

For the first time, the count and the duchess spoke of their mutual desires in veiled terms; and when they parted, a treaty of alliance had been concluded.

At the other end of the room everyone was laughing at a story M. de Musadieu was telling to the Baroness de Corbelle about the presentation of a negro ambassador to the President of the Republic, when the Marquis de Farandal was announced.

He appeared in the doorway and paused. With a quick and familiar gesture, he placed a monocle on his right eye and left it there, as if to reconnoiter the room he was about to enter, but perhaps to give those that were already there time to see him and to observe his entrance. Then by an imperceptible movement of cheek and eyebrow, he let the monocle fall from his eye and hang at the end of a silk cord, and advanced quickly toward Madame de Guilleroy, whose extended hand he kissed, bowing very low. He greeted his aunt likewise, then shook hands with the rest of the company, going from one to another with easy elegance of manner.

He was a tall fellow, with a red mustache, and was already slightly bald, with the figure of an officer and the gait of an English sportsman. It was evident, at first sight, that all his limbs were better exercised than his head, and that he cared only for such occupations as developed strength and physical activity. He had some education, however, for he had learned, and was learning every day, by much mental effort, a great deal that would be useful to him to know later: history, studying dates unweariedly, but mistaking the lesson to be learned from facts and the elementary notions of political economy necessary to a deputy, the A B C of sociology for the use of the ruling classes.

Musadieu esteemed him, saying: "He will be a valuable man." Bertin appreciated his skill and his vigor. They went to the same fencing-hall, often hunted together, and met while riding in the avenues of the Bois. Between them, therefore, had been formed a sympathy of similar tastes, that instinctive freemasonry which creates between two men a ready subject of conversation, as agreeable to one as to the other.

When the marquis was presented to Annette de Guilleroy, he immediately had a suspicion of his aunt's designs, and after greeting her he ran his eyes over her, with the rapid glance of a connoisseur.

He decided that she was graceful,

and, above all, full of promise, for he had led so many cotillons that he knew young girls well and could predict almost to a certainty the future of their beauty as an expert who tastes a wine as yet too new.

He exchanged only a few unimportant words with her, then seated himself near the Baroness de Corbelle, so that he could chat with her in an undertone.

Every one took leave at an early hour, and when all had gone, when the child was in her bed, the lamps extinguished, the servants gone to their own quarters, the Comte de Guilleroy, walking up and down the drawing-room, lighted now by only two candles, detained the countess, who was half asleep in an armchair, for some time to tell her of his hopes, to lay down the plan they should follow, to forecast all the combinations, the events and the precautions to be taken.

It was late when he retired, charmed, however, with his evening and murmuring: "I believe that that affair is a certainty."

CHAPTER III

A FLAME REKINDLED

"When will you come, my friend? I have not seen you for three days, and that seems a long time to me. My daughter occupies much of my time, but you know that I can no longer do without you."

The painter, who was drawing sketches, ever seeking a new subject, reread the countess' note. Then, opening the drawer of a writing-desk, he deposited it on a heap of other letters, which had been accumulating there.

Thanks to the opportunities given them by the customs of fashionable society, they had grown used to seeing each other almost every day. Now and then she visited him and sat for an hour or two in the armchair in which she had posed while he worked. But, as she feared the criticisms of the servants, she preferred to receive him at her own home or to meet him at some reception for that daily interview, that small change of love.

These meetings would be agreed upon beforehand and always seemed perfectly natural to M. de Guilleroy.

Twice a week at least the painter dined at the countess' house with a few friends; on Monday nights he visited her in her box at the Opéra; then they would agree upon a meeting at such or such a house, to which chance led them at the same hour. He knew the evenings that she did not go out and would call then to have a cup of tea with her, feeling himself at home even near the folds of her dress, so tenderly and surely settled in that ripened affection, so fixed in the habit of seeing her somewhere, of spending a few moments by her side.

The desire for family life, for a bright, cheerful household, for the fam-

ily table, for those evenings when one talks without exertion to old friends, that desire for contact, for familiarity, for human intercourse which dwells dormant in every human heart, and which every old bachelor carries from door to door to his friends, where he installs something of himself, added a strain of egoism to his sentiments of affection. In that house, where he was loved and spoiled, where he found everything, he could still rest and coddle his loneliness.

For three days he had not seen his friends, who were probably very much occupied with the return of the daughter of the house; and he was already feeling bored and even a little offended because they had not sent for him sooner, but not wishing, as a matter of discretion, to be the first to make an approach.

The countess' letter aroused him like the lash of a whip. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. He decided to go immediately to her house, that he might find her before she went out.

The valet appeared in answer to the bell.

"What sort of weather is it, Joseph?"

"Very fine, monsieur."

"Warm?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"White waistcoat, blue jacket, gray hat."

He always dressed fastidiously, but although his tailor turned him out in correct style, the very way in which he wore his clothes, his manner of walking, his comfortable proportions encased in a white waistcoat, his high gray felt hat, tilted a little toward the back of his head, seemed to reveal at once that he was both an artist and a bachelor.

When he reached the countess' house he was told that she was dressing for a drive in the Bois. He was a little vexed at this and waited.

According to his habit, he began to pace to and fro in the drawing-room, going from one seat to another or from the windows to the wall in the large drawing-room darkened by the curtains. On the light tables with gilded feet trifles of various kinds, useless, pretty and costly, lay scattered about in studied disorder. There were little antique boxes of chased gold, miniature snuff-boxes, ivory statuettes, objects in dull silver, quite modern, of an exaggerated severity, in which English taste appeared: a diminutive kitchen stove and upon it a cat drinking from a pan, a cigarette-case simulating a loaf of bread, a coffee-pot to hold matches, and in a casket a complete set of doll's jewelry—necklace, bracelets, rings, brooches, earrings set with diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, a microscopic fancy that seemed to have been executed by Lilliputian jewelers.

From time to time he touched some object given by himself on some anniversary. He lifted it, handled it, examining it with dreamy indifference, then put it back in its place.

In one corner some books that were luxuriously bound, but seldom opened, lay within easy reach on a round table with a single leg for a foundation, which stood before a little curved sofa. The *Revue des Deux Mondes* lay there also, somewhat worn, with turned-down pages, as if it had been read and reread many times; other publications lay near it, some of them uncut: the *Arts modernes,* which is bought only because of

its cost, the subscription price being four hundred francs a year, and the *Feuille libre,* a thin volume between blue covers, in which appear the more recent poets called *"les enervés."*

Between the windows stood the countess' writing-desk, a coquettish piece of furniture of the last century, on which she wrote replies to those hurried questions handed to her during her receptions. A few books were on that also, familiar books, index to the heart and mind of a woman: Musset, Manon Lescaut, Werther, and to show that she was not a stranger to the complicated sensations and mysteries of psychology, *Les Fleurs du Mal, Le Rouge et le Noir, La Femme au XVIIIe Siècle, Adolphe.*

Beside the books lay a charming hand-mirror, a masterpiece of the silversmith's art, the glass being turned down upon a square of embroidered velvet, in order to allow one to admire the curious gold and silver workmanship on the back. Bertin took it up and looked at his own reflection. For some years he had been growing terribly old in appearance, and although he thought that his face showed more originality than when he was younger, the sight of his heavy cheeks and increasing wrinkles saddened him.

A door opened behind him.

"Good-morning, Monsieur Bertin," said Annette.

"Good-morning, little one. Are you well?"

"Very well; and you?"

"What, are you not saying 'thou' to me, then, after all?"

"No, indeed! It would really embarrass me."

"Nonsense!"

"Yes, it would. You make me feel timid."

"And why, pray?"

"Because—because you are neither young enough nor old enough——"

The painter laughed.

"After such a reason as that I will insist no more."

She blushed suddenly, up to the white brow, where the waves of hair began to ripple, and resumed with an air of slight confusion:

"Mamma told me to say to you that she will be down immediately and to ask whether you will go to the Bois de Boulogne with us."

"Yes, certainly. You are alone?"

"No; with the Duchesse de Mortemain."

"Very well; I will go."

"Then, if you will allow me, I will go and put on my hat."

"Yes, go, my child."

As Annette left the room the countess entered, veiled, ready to set forth. She extended her hands.

"We never see you any more. What are you doing?" she inquired.

"I did not wish to trouble you just at this time," said Bertin.

In the tone with which she spoke the word "Olivier!" she expressed all her reproaches and all her attachment.

"You are the best woman in the world," he said, touched by the tender intonation of his name.

This little quarrel being settled, the countess resumed her light society tone.

"We shall pick up the duchess at her hôtel and then make a tour of the Bois. We must show all that sort of thing to Nanette, you know."

The landau awaited them under the porte-cochère.

Bertin seated himself facing the two ladies, and the carriage departed, the pawing of the horses making a resonant sound against the over-arching roof of th porte-cochère.

Along the grand boulevard descending toward the Madeleine all the gaiety of the springtime seemed to have fallen upon the tide of humanity.

The soft air and the sunshine lent to the men a festive air, to the women a suggestion of love. The bakers' boys deposited their baskets on the benches to run and play with their brethren, the street urchins; the dogs appeared in a great hurry to go somewhere; the canaries hanging in the boxes of the concierges trilled loudly; only the ancient cab horses kept their usual sedate pace.

"Oh, what a beautiful day! How good it is to live!" murmured the countess.

The painter contemplated both mother and daughter in the dazzling light. Certainly they were different, but at the same time so much alike that the latter was veritably a continuation of the former, made of the same blood, the same flesh, animated by the same life. Their eyes, above all, those blue eyes flecked with tiny black dots of such a brilliant blue in the daughter, a little faded in the mother, fixed upon him a look so similar that he expected to hear them make the same replies. And he was surprised to discover, as he made them laugh and talk, that before him were two very distinct women, one who had lived and one who was about to live. No, he did not foresee what would become of that child when her young mind, influenced by tastes and instincts that were as yet dormant, should have expanded and developed amid the life of the world. This was a pretty little new person, ready for adventures and for love, unknown and ignorant, who was sailing out of port like a vessel, while her mother was returning, having passed through life and having loved!

He was touched at the thought that she had chosen himself, and that she preferred him still, this woman, who had remained so pretty, rocked in that landau, in the warm air of springtime.

As he expressed his gratitude to her in a glance, she divined it, and he thought he could feel her thanks in the rustle of her robe.

In his turn he murmured: "Oh, yes, what a beautiful day!"

When they had taken up the duchess in the Rue de Varenne they spun along at a swift pace toward the Invalides, crossed the Seine and reached the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, going up toward the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile in the midst of a sea of carriages.

The young girl was seated beside Olivier, riding backward, and she opened wide upon this stream of equipages eager, innocent eyes. Occasionally, when the duchess and the countess acknowledged a bow with a short movement of the head, she would ask, "Who is that?" Bertin answered: "The Pontaiglin," "the Puicelci," "the Comtesse de Lochrist" or "the beautiful Madame Mandelière."

Now they were following the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne, amid the noise and rattling of wheels. The carriages, a little less crowded than below the Arc de Triomphe, seemed to struggle in an endless race. The cabs, the heavy landaus, the solemn eight-spring vehicles, passed one another over and over again,

distanced suddenly by a rapid victoria, drawn by a single trotter, bearing along at a reckless pace, through all that rolling throng, *bourgeois* and aristocratic, through all societies, all classes, all hierarchies, an indolent young woman, whose bright and striking toilette diffused among the carriages it touched in passing a strange perfume of some unknown flower.

"Who is that lady?" Annette inquired.

"I don't know," said Bertin, at which reply the duchess and the countess exchanged a smile.

The leaves were opening, the familiar nightingales of that Parisian garden were singing already among the tender verdure, and when, as the carriage approached the lake, it joined the long file of other vehicles at a walk, there was an incessant exchange of salutations, smiles and friendly words as the wheels touched. The procession seemed now like a fleet of boats gliding along in which were seated very well-bred ladies and gentlemen. The duchess, who was bowing incessantly in response to raised hats or inclined heads, appeared to be passing them in review, calling to mind what she knew, thought or supposed of these people as they defiled before her.

"Look, dearest, there is the lovely Madame Mandelière again—the beauty of the Republic."

In a light and dashing carriage the beauty of the Republic, apparently indifferent to this undisputed fame, allowed herself to be admired, her large dark eyes, her low brow beneath a veil of dusky hair and her mouth, which was a shade too obstinate in its lines.

"Very beautiful, all the same," said Bertin.

The countess did not like to hear him praise other women. She shrugged her shoulders slightly, but said nothing.

But the young girl, in whom the instinct of rivalry suddenly awoke, ventured to say: "I do not find her beautiful at all."

"What! You do not think her beautiful?" said the painter.

"No; she looks as if she had been dipped in ink."

The duchess, delighted, burst into laughter.

"Bravo, little one!" she cried. "For the last six years half the men in Paris have been swooning at the feet of that negress! I believe that they are making fun of us. Look at the Comtesse de Lochrist instead."

Alone, in a landau with a white poodle, the countess, delicate as a miniature, a blonde with brown eyes, whose grace and beauty had served for five or six years as the theme for the admiration of her partisans, bowed to the ladies with a fixed smile on her lips.

But Nanette exhibited no greater enthusiasm than before.

"Oh," she said, "she is no longer young!"

Bertin, who usually did not at all agree with the countess in the daily discussions of these two rivals, felt a sudden irritation at the stupid intolerance of this little simpleton.

"Nonsense!" he said. "Whether one likes her or not, she is charming; and I only hope that you may become as pretty as she."

"Pooh! pooh!" said the duchess. "You notice women only after they have passed the thirtieth year. The child is right. You admire only *passée* beauty."

"Pardon me!" he exclaimed; "a woman is really beautiful only after maturing, when the expression of her face has become fully developed!"

He enlarged upon this idea that the first youthful freshness is only the veneer of riper beauty; he demonstrated that men of the world were wise in paying but little attention to young girls in their first season and that they were right in proclaiming them beautiful only when they had passed into their later period of bloom.

The countess, flattered, murmured: "He is right; he speaks as an artist. The youthful countenance is very charming, but it is always a trifle commonplace."

The painter continued to urge his point, indicating at what moment a face that was losing, little by little, the undecided grace of youth, really assumed its definite form, its true character and physiognomy.

At each word the countess said "Yes" with a little nod of conviction, and the more he affirmed, with all the heat of a lawyer making a plea, with the animation of the accused pleading his own cause, the more she approved, by glance and gesture, as if they two were allied against some danger and must defend themselves against some false and menacing opinion. Annette hardly heard them, she was so engrossed in looking about her. Her usually smiling face had become grave and she said no more, carried away by the pleasure of the rapid driving. The sunlight, the trees, the carriage, this delightful life, so rich and gay—all this was for her!

Every day she might come here, recognized in her turn, saluted and envied, and perhaps the men, in pointing her out to one another, would say that she was beautiful. She noticed all those that appeared to her distinguished among the throng and inquired their names, without thinking of anything beyond the mere sound of the syllables, though sometimes they awoke in her an echo of respect and admiration, when she realized that she had seen them often in the newspapers or heard stories concerning them. She could not become accustomed to this long procession of celebrities; it seemed unreal to her, as if she were a part of some stage spectacle. The cabs filled her with disdain mingled with disgust; they annoyed and irritated her, and suddenly she said:

"I think they should not allow anything but private carriages to come here."

"Indeed, mademoiselle!" said Bertin; "and then what becomes of our equality, liberty and fraternity?"

Annette made a *moue* that signified "Don't talk about that!" and continued:

"They should have a separate Bois for cabs—that of Vincennes, for instance."

"You are behind the times, little one, and evidently do not know that we are swimming in the full tide of democracy. But, if you wish to see this place free from any mingling of the middle class, come in the morning, and then you will find only the fine flower of society."

He proceeded to describe graphically, as he knew well how to do, the Bois in the morning hours with its gay cavaliers and fair Amazons, that club where every one knows every one else by their Christian names, their pet names, their

family connections, titles, qualities and vices, as if they all lived in the same neighborhood or in the same small town.

"Do you come here often at that hour?" Annette inquired.

"Very often. There is no more charming place in Paris."

"Do you come on horseback in the mornings?"

"Yes."

"And in the afternoon you pay visits?"

"Yes."

"Then, when do you work?"

"Oh, I work—sometimes; and besides, you see, I have chosen a special entertainment suited to my tastes. As I paint the portraits of beautiful women, it is necessary that I should see them and follow them everywhere."

"On foot and on horseback!" murmured Annette with a perfectly serious face.

He threw her a sidelong glance of appreciation, which seemed to say: "Ah! you are witty, even now! You will do very well."

A breath of cold air from far away, from the country that was hardly awake as yet, swept over the park, and the whole Bois, coquettish, frivolous and fashionable, shivered under its chill. For some seconds it caused the tender leaves to tremble on the trees and the garments on shoulders. All the women, with almost simultaneous movement, drew up over their arms and chests their wraps lying behind them, and the horses began to trot, from one end of the avenue to the other, as if the keen wind had flicked them like a whip.

The countess' party returned quickly, to the silvery jingle of the harness, under the slanting red rays of the setting sun.

"Are you going home?" inquired the countess of Bertin, with whose habits she was familiar.

"No, I am going to the club."

"Then, shall we set you down there in passing?"

"Thank you, that will be very kind."

"And when will you invite us to breakfast with the duchess?"

"Name your day."

This painter in ordinary to the fair Parisians, whom his admirers christened "a Watteau realist" and his detractors a "photographer of gowns and mantles," often received at breakfast or at dinner the beautiful persons whose features he had reproduced, as well as the celebrated and the well known, who found these little entertainments in a bachelor's establishment very amusing.

"The day after to-morrow, then. Will the day after to-morrow suit you, my dear duchess?" asked Madame de Guilleroy.

"Yes, indeed; you are charming! Monsieur Bertin never thinks of me when he has his little parties. It is quite evident that I am no longer young."

The countess, accustomed to consider the artist's home almost the same as her own, replied:

"Only we four, the four of the landau—the duchess, Annette, you and I, eh. great artist?"

"Only ourselves,'" said he, alighting from the carriage, "and I will have prepared for your some crabs *à alsacienne*."

"Oh, you will make a gourmande of the little one!"

He bowed to them, standing beside the carriage door, then entered quickly the vestibule of the main entrance to

the club, threw his topcoat and cane to a group of footmen, who had risen like soldiers at the passing of an officer; mounted the broad stairway, meeting another brigade of servants in knee breeches, pushed open a door, feeling himself suddenly as alert as a young man, as he heard at the end of the corridor a continuous clash of foils, the sound of stamping feet and loud exclamations: *"Touché!" "A moi!" "Passé!" "J'en ai!" "Touché!" "A vous!"*

In the fencing-hall the swordsmen, dressed in gray linen, with leather vests, their trousers tight around the ankles, a sort of apron falling over the front of the body, one arm in the air, the hand thrown backward, and in the other hand, enormous in a large fencing-glove, the thin flexible foil, extended and withdrawn with the agile swiftness of mechanical jumping-jacks.

Others rested and chatted, still out of breath, red and perspiring, with handkerchief in hand to wipe off faces and necks; others, seated on a square divan that ran along the four sides of the hall, watched the fencing—Liverdy against Landa and the master of the club, Taillade, against the tall Rocdiane.

Bertin, smiling, quite at home, shook hands with several men.

"I choose you!" cried the Baron de Baverie.

"I am with you, my dear fellow," said Bertin, passing into the dressing-room to prepare himself.

He had not felt so agile and vigorous for a long time, and, guessing that he should fence well that day, he hurried as impatiently as a schoolboy ready for play. As soon as he stood before his adversary he attacked him with great ardor, and in ten minutes he had touched him eleven times and had so fatigued him that the baron cried for quarter. Then he fenced with Punisimont and with his colleague, Amaury Maldant.

The cold douche that followed, freezing his pulsating flesh, reminded him of the baths of his twentieth year, when he used to plunge head first into the Seine from the bridges in the suburbs, in order to amaze the *bourgeois* passers-by.

"Shall you dine here?" inquired Maldant.

"Yes."

"We have a table with Liverdy, Rocdiane and Landa; make haste; it is a quarter past seven."

The dining-room was full and there was a continuous hum of men's voices.

There were all the nocturnal bohemians of Paris, idlers and workers, all those who from seven o'clock in the evening know not what to do and dine at the club, ready to catch at anything or anybody that chance may offer to amuse them.

When the five friends were seated the banker Liverdy, a vigorous and hearty man of forty, said to Bertin:

"You were in fine form this evening."

"Yes, I could have done surprising things to-day," Bertin replied.

The other smiled, and the landscape painter, Amaury Maldant, a thin little bald-headed man with a gray beard, said with a sly expression:

"I too, always feel a rising of the sap in April; it makes me bring forth a few leaves—half a dozen at most—then it runs into sentiment; there never is any fruit."

The Marquis de Rocdiane and the

Comte Landa sympathized with him. Both were older than he, though even a keen eye could not guess their age. Clubmen, horsemen, swordsmen, whose incessant exercise had given them bodies of steel, they boasted of being younger in every way than the enervated good-for-nothings of the new generation.

Rocdiane, of good family, with the *entrée* to all salons, though suspected of financial intrigues of many kinds (which, according to Bertin, was not surprising, since he had lived so much in the gaming houses), married, but separated from his wife, who paid him an annuity, a director of Belgian and Portuguese banks, carried boldly upon his energetic, Don Quixote-like face the somewhat tarnished honor of a gentleman, which was occasionally brightened by the blood from a thrust in a duel.

The Comte de Landa, a good-natured colossus, proud of his figure and his shoulders, although married and the father of two children, found it difficult to dine at home three times a week; he remained at the club on the other days, with his friends, after the session in the fencing-hall.

"The club is a family," he said, "the family of those who as yet have none, of those who never will have one and of those who are bored by their own."

The conversation branched off on the subject of women, glided from anecdotes to reminiscences, from reminiscences to boasts, and then to indiscreet confidences.

The Marquis de Rocdiane allowed the names of his inamoratas to be guessed by unmistakable hints—society women whose names he did not utter, so that their identity might be the better surmised. The banker Liverdy indicated his flames by their first names. He would say: "I was at that time the best of friends with ——. Now, one evening when I was leaving her, I said to her, 'My little Marguerite' "—then he checked himself, amid the smiles of his fellows, adding: "Ha! I let something slip. One should form a habit of calling all women Sophie."

Olivier Bertin, very reserved, was accustomed to declare when questioned:

"For my part, I content myself with my models."

They pretended to believe him, and Landa, who was frankly a libertine, grew quite excited at the idea of all the pretty creatures that walked the streets and all the young persons who posed undraped before the painter at ten francs an hour.

As the bottles became empty, all these graybeards, as the younger members of the club called them, grew very red in the face, and their kindling ardor awakened new desires.

Rocdiane, after the coffee, became still more indiscreet, and forgot the society women to celebrate the charms of simple *cocottes*.

"Paris!" said he, a glass of kümmel in his hand, "the only city where a man never grows old, the only one where, at fifty, if he is sound and well preserved, he will always find a young girl, as pretty as an angel, to love him."

Landa, finding again his Rocdiane after the liqueurs, applauded him enthusiastically and mentioned the young girls who still adored him every day.

But Liverdy, more sceptical, and pretending to know exactly what women were worth, murmured: "Yes, they tell you that they adore you!"

"They prove it to me, my dear fellow," exclaimed Landa.

"Such proofs don't count."

"They suffice me!"

"But, *sacrebleu!* they do mean it," cried Rocdiane. "Do you believe that a pretty little creature of twenty, who has been going the rounds in Paris for five or six years already, where all our mustaches have taught her kisses and spoiled her taste for them, still knows how to distinguish a man of thirty from a man of sixty? Pshaw! what nonsense! She has seen and known too many of them. Now, I'll wager that, down in the bottom of her heart, she actually prefers an old banker to a young stripling. Does she know or reflect upon that? Have men any age here? Oh, my dear fellow, we grow young as we grow gray, and the whiter our hair becomes the more they tell us they love us, the more they show it and the more they believe it."

They rose from the table, their blood warmed and lashed by alcohol, ready to make any conquest; and they began to deliberate how to spend the evening, Bertin mentioning the Cirque, Rocdiane the Hippodrome, Maldant the Eden and Landa the Folies-Bergère, when a light and distant sound of the tuning of violins reached their ears.

"Ah, there is music at the club today, it seems," said Rocdiane.

"Yes," Bertin replied. "Shall we listen for ten minutes before going out?"

"Agreed."

They crossed a salon, a billiard-room, a card-room and finally reached a sort of box over the gallery of the musicians. Four gentlemen, ensconced in armchairs, were waiting there already, in easy attitudes, while below, among rows of empty seats, a dozen others were chatting, sitting or standing.

The conductor tapped his desk with his bow; the music began.

Olivier adored music as an opium-eater adores opium. It made him dream.

As soon as the sonorous wave from the instruments reached him he felt himself borne away in a sort of nervous intoxication, which thrilled body and mind indescribably. His imagination ran riot, made drunk by melody, and carried him along through sweet dreams and charming reveries. With closed eyes, legs crossed and folded arms, he listened to the strains and gave himself up to the visions that passed before his eyes and into his mind.

The orchestra was playing one of Haydn's symphonies, and when Bertin's eyelids drooped over his eyes he saw again the Bois, the crowd of carriages around him and facing him in the landau the countess and her daughter. He heard their voices, followed their words, felt the movement of the carriage, inhaled the air, filled with the odor of young leaves.

Three times his neighbor, speaking to him, interrupted this vision, which three times he began again, as the rolling of the vessel seems to continue when, after crossing the ocean, one lies motionless in bed.

Then it extended itself to a long voyage, with the two women always seated before him, sometimes on the railway, again at the table of strange hotels. During the whole execution of the symphony they accompanied him, as if, while driving with him in the sunshine, they had left the image of their two faces imprinted on his vision.

Silence followed. Then came a noise

of seats being moved and chattering of voices, which dispelled this vapor of a dream, and he perceived, dozing around him, his four friends, relaxed from a listening attitude to the comfortable posture of sleep.

"Well, what shall we do now?" he asked, after he had roused them.

"I should like to sleep here a little longer," replied Rocdiane frankly.

"And I too," said Landa.

Bertin rose.

"Well, I shall go home," he said. "I am rather tired."

He felt very lively, on the contrary, but he wished to go, fearing the end of the evening around the baccarat-table, which he knew so well.

He went home, therefore, and the following day, after a restless night, one of those nights that put artists in that condition of cerebral activity called inspiration, he decided not to go out, but to work until evening.

It was an excellent day, one of those days of facile production, when ideas seem to descend into the hands and form upon the canvas of their own accord.

With doors shut, far from the world, in the quiet of his own dwelling, closed to everyone, in the friendly peace of his studio, with clear eye, lucid mind, enthusiastic, alert, he tasted that happiness given only to artists, the happiness of bringing forth their work in joy. Nothing existed any more for him in such hours of work except the piece of canvas on which was born an image under the caress of his brush; and he experienced, in these crises of productiveness, a strange and delicious sensation of abounding life which intoxicated him. When evening came he was exhausted as by healthful fatigue, and went to sleep with agreeable anticipation of his breakfast the next morning.

The table was covered with flowers, the *menu* was carefully chosen for Madame de Guilleroy's sake, as she was a refined epicure; and in spite of a strong but brief resistance, the painter compelled his guests to drink champagne.

"The little one will get intoxicated," protested the countess.

"Dear me! there must be a first time," replied the indulgent duchess.

Everyone, as the party returned to the studio, felt exhilarated by a buoyancy of spirits in which one seems to soar as though the feet had wings.

The duchess and the countess, having to attend a meeting of the Committee of French Mothers, were to take Annette home before going to the meeting; but Bertin offered to take her for a walk, and then to the Boulevard Malesherbes; so both ladies left them.

"Let us take the longest way," said Annette.

"Would you like to stroll about the Monceau Park?" asked Bertin. "It is a very pretty place; we will look at the babies and nurses."

"Yes, I should like that."

They walked along the Avenue Velasquez and entered the immense gilded gate that serves as an emblem and an entrance to that exquisite jewel of a park, displaying in the heart of Paris its verdant and artificial beauty, surrounded by a belt of princely mansions.

Along the wide walks, which unroll their massive and artistic curves through grassy lawns, throngs of people, sitting on iron chairs, watch the passersby; while in the little shady paths, winding like streams, groups of children crawl

in the sand, run about, or jump the rope under the indolent eyes of nurses or the anxious watchfulness of mothers. The enormous trees, rounded into domes like monuments of leaves, huge horse-chestnuts, whose heavy verdure is lighted up by red and white clusters, the showy sycamores, the graceful plane-trees with their trunks artificially twisted, add to the charming perspective of large undulating lawns.

The weather was warm, the turtle-doves were cooing among the branches, and flying to meet one another from the tree-tops, while the sparrows bathed in the rainbow formed by the sunshine and the spray thrown over the smooth turf. White statues on their pedestals seemed happy in the midst of the green freshness. A little marble boy was drawing from his foot an invisible thorn, as if he had just pricked himself in running after the Diana fleeing toward the little lake imprisoned in the woods that screen the ruins of a temple.

Other statues, amorous and cold, embraced one another on the borders of the groves, or dreamed there, their hands clasping one knee. A cascade foamed and rolled over the pretty rocks; a tree, truncated like a column, supported an ivy; a tombstone bore an inscription. The stone shafts erected on the lawns hardly suggest the Acropolis any more than this elegant little park recalls wild forests. It is the charming and artificial place where city people go to look at flowers grown in hothouses, and to admire, as one admires the spectacle of life at the theatre, that agreeable representation of the beauties of nature given in the heart of Paris.

Olivier Bertin had come almost every day for years to this favorite spot to look at the fair Parisians moving in their appropriate setting. "It is a park made for toilettes," he would say; "badly dressed people are horrible in it." He would rove about there for hours, knowing all the plants and all the habitual visitors.

He now strolled beside Annette along the avenues, his eye distracted by the motley and animated crowd in the gardens.

"Oh, the little love!" exclaimed Annette. She was gazing at a tiny boy with blond curls, who was looking at her with his blue eyes full of surprise and delight.

Then she passed all the children in review, and the pleasure she felt in seeing those living dolls, decked out in their dainty ribbons, made her talkative and communicative.

She walked slowly, chatting to Bertin, giving him her reflections on the children, the nurses, and the mothers. The larger children drew from her little exclamations of joy, while the little pale ones touched her sympathy.

Bertin listened, more amused by her than by the little ones, and, always remembering his work, he murmured, "That is delicious!" thinking that he must make an exquisite picture, with one corner of this park and a bouquet of nurses, mothers and children. Why had he never thought of it before?

"You like those little ones?" he inquired.

"I adore them!"

He felt, from her manner of looking at them, that she longed to take them in her arms, to hug and kiss them—the natural and tender longing of a future mother; and he was surprised at this

secret instinct hidden in this little woman.

As she appeared ready to talk, he questioned her about her tastes. She admitted, with pretty naïveté, that she had hopes of social success and glory, and that she desired to have fine horses, which she understood almost as well as a horse-dealer, for a part of the farm at Roncières was devoted to breeding; but she appeared to trouble her head no more about a *fiancé* than one is concerned about an apartment, which is always to be found among the multitude of houses to rent.

They approached the lake, where two swans and six ducks were quietly floating, as clean and calm as porcelain birds, and they passed before a young woman sitting on a chair, with an open book lying on her knees, her eyes gazing upward, her soul having apparently taken flight in a dream.

She was as motionless as a wax figure. Plain, humble, dressed as a modest girl who has no thought of pleasing, she had gone to the land of Dreams, carried away by a phrase or a word that had bewitched her heart. Undoubtedly she was continuing, according to the impulse of her hopes, the adventure begun in the book.

Bertin paused, surprised. "How beautiful to dream like that!" said he.

They had passed before her; now they turned and passed her again without her perceiving them, so absorbed was she in the distant flight of her thought.

"Tell me, little one," said the painter to Annette, "would it bore you very much to pose for me once or twice?"

"No, indeed! Quite the contrary."

"Look well at that young lady who is roaming in the world of fancy."

"The lady there, in that chair?"

"Yes. Well, you, too, will sit on a chair, you will have an open book on your knee, and you will try to do as she does. Have you ever had any day-dreams?"

"Yes, indeed."

"What about?"

He tried to confess her as to her aerial flights, but she would make no reply, evaded his questions, looked at the ducks, swimming after some bread thrown to them by a lady, and seemed embarrassed, as if he had touched upon a subject that was a sensitive point with her.

Then, to change the conversation, she talked about her life at Roncières, spoke of her grandmother, to whom she read aloud a long time every day, and who must now feel very lonely and sad.

As he listened, the painter felt as gay as a bird, gay as he never had been. All that she had said, all the doings, the trifling everyday details of the simple life of a young girl, amused and interested him.

"Let us sit down," he said.

They seated themselves near the water, and the two swans came sailing toward them, expecting some fresh dainty.

Bertin felt recollections awakening within him—those vanished memories that are drowned in forgetfulness, and which suddenly return, one knows not why. They surged up rapidly, all kinds, and so numerous at the same time that it seemed to him a hand was stirring the miry depths of his memory.

He tried to guess the reason of this rising to the surface of his former life which he had felt and remarked on

previous occasions, but never so insistently as to-day. A cause always existed for these sudden recollections—a natural and simple cause, an odor, perhaps, often a perfume. How many times a woman's draperies, with the evaporating breath of some essence, had brought to him in passing, a host of forgotten events. At the bottom of old perfume-bottles he had often found bits of his former existence; and all wandering odors—of streets, fields, houses, furniture, sweet or unsavory, the warm odors of summer evenings, the cold breath of winter nights, revived within him far-off reminiscences, as if odors retained embalmed dead-and-gone memories, as spices preserve mummies.

Was it the damp grass or the chestnut blossoms that thus revivified the past? No. What, then?

Was it his eye to which he owed this susceptibility? What had he seen? Nothing. Among the persons he had met, perhaps one might have resembled some one he had known, and, although he had not recognized it, it might have rung in his heart all the chords of the past.

Was it not a sound, rather? Very often he had heard by chance a piano, an unknown voice, even a hand-organ in the street playing some old air, which had suddenly made him feel twenty years younger, filling his breast with tender recollections, long buried.

But this appeal, continued, incessant, intangible, almost irritating! What was there near him to revive thus his extinct emotions?

"It is growing a little cool; we must go home," he said.

They rose, and resumed their walk.

He looked at the poor people sitting on benches, for whom a chair was too great an expense.

Annette also observed them, and felt disturbed at the thought of their lives, their occupations, surprised that they should come to lounge in this beautiful public garden, when their own appearance was so forlorn.

More than ever was Olivier now dreaming over past years. It seemed to him that a fly was humming in his ear, filling it with a buzzing song of bygone days.

The young girl, observing his dreamy air, asked:

"What is the matter? You seem sad."

His heart thrilled within him. Who had said that? She or her mother? Not her mother with her present voice but with her voice of long ago, so changed that he had only just recognized it.

"Nothing," he replied, smiling. "You entertain me very much; you are very charming, and you remind me of your mother."

How was it that he had not sooner remarked this strange echo of a voice once so familiar, now coming from these fresh lips?

"Go on talking," he said.

"Of what?"

"Tell me what your teachers have taught you. Did you like them?"

She began again to chat pleasantly. He listened, stirred by a growing anxiety; he watched and waited to detect, among the phrases of this young girl almost a stranger to his heart, a word, a sound, a laugh, that seemed to have been imprisoned in her throat since her mother's youth. Certain intonations made him tremble with astonishment. Of course there were differences in their tones, the resemblance of which he had

not remarked immediately, and which were in some ways so dissimilar that he had not confounded them at all; but these differences rendered all the more striking this sudden reproduction of the maternal speech. He had noted their facial resemblance with a friendly and curious eye, but now the mystery of this resuscitated voice mingled them in such a way that, turning away his head that he might no longer see the young girl, he asked himself whether it were not the countess who was speaking thus to him, twelve years earlier.

Then when he had woven this hallucination, he turned toward her again, and found, as their eyes met, a little of that shy hesitation with which the mother's gaze had met his in the first days of their friendship.

They had already walked three times round the park, passing always before the same persons, the same nurses and children.

Annette was now inspecting the buildings surrounding the garden, inquiring the names of their owners. She wished to know all about them, asked questions with eager curiosity, seeming to fill her feminine mind with these details, and, with interested face, listening with her eyes as much as with her ears.

But when they arrived at the pavilion that separates the two gates of the outer boulevard, Bertin perceived that it was almost four o'clock.

"Oh," he said, "we must go home."

They walked slowly toward the Boulevard Malesherbes.

After the painter had left Annette at her home he proceeded toward the Place de la Concorde.

He sang to himself softly, longed to run, and would have been glad to jump over the benches, so agile did he feel. Paris seemed radiant to him, more beautiful than ever. "Decidedly the springtime casts a glamor over the whole world," was his reflection.

He was in one of those periods of mental excitement when one understands everything with more pleasure, when the vision is clearer and more comprehensive, when one feels a keener joy in seeing and feeling, as if an all-powerful hand had brightened all the colors of earth, reanimated all living creatures, and had wound up in us, as in a watch that has stopped, the activity of sensation.

He thought, as his glance took in a thousand amusing things: "And I said that there were moments when I could no longer find subjects to paint!"

He felt such a sensation of freedom and clear-sightedness that all his artistic work seemed commonplace to him, and he conceived a new way of expressing life, truer and more original; and suddenly he was seized with a desire to return home and work, so he retraced his steps and shut himself up in his studio.

But as soon as he was alone, before a newly begun picture, the ardor that had burned in his blood began to cool. He felt tired, sat down on his divan, and again gave himself up to dreaming.

The sort of happy indifference in which he lived, that carelessness of the satisfied man whose almost every need is gratified, was leaving his heart by degrees, as if something were still lacking. He realized that his house was empty and his studio deserted. Then, looking round him, he fancied he saw pass by him the shadow of a woman whose presence was sweet.

He got up, unable to sit quietly any longer, and began to walk, thinking again that, in spite of this intimacy that had so filled his life, he still remained alone, always alone. After the long hours of work, when he looked around him, dazed as one who reawakens and returns to life, he saw and felt only walls within reach of his hand and voice. Not having any woman in his home, and not being able to meet the one he loved except with the precautions of a thief, he had been compelled to spend his leisure time in public places where one finds or purchases the means of killing time. He was accustomed to going to the club, to the Cirque and the Hippodrome on fixed days, to the Opéra, and to all sorts of places, so that he should not be compelled to go home, where no doubt he would have lived in perfect happiness had he only had her beside him.

Formerly, in certain hours of tender passion, he had suffered cruelly because he could not take her and keep her with him; then, as his ardor cooled, he had accepted quietly their separation and his own liberty; now he regretted those past hours, as though his love were being renewed. And this return of tenderness invaded his heart so suddenly, almost without reason, because the weather was fine, and possibly because a little while ago he had recognized the rejuvenated voice of that woman! How slight a thing it takes to move a man's heart, a man who is gradually growing old, with whom remembrance turns into regret!

As in former days, the need of seeing her again came to him, entering body and mind, like a fever; and he began to think after the fashion of a young lover, exalting her in his heart, and feeling himself exalted in his desire for her; then he decided, although he had seen her only that morning, to go and ask for a cup of tea that same evening.

The hours seemed long to him, and as he set out for the Boulevard Malesherbes he was seized with a fear of not finding her, which would force him to pass another evening alone, as he had passed so many others.

To his query: "Is the countess at home?" the servant's answer, "Yes, monsieur," filled him with joy.

He said, with a radiant air: "Here I am again!" as he appeared at the threshold of the smaller drawing-room where the two ladies were working, under the pink shade of a double lamp of English metal, on a high and slender stem.

"What, is it you? How fortunate!" exclaimed the countess.

"Well, yes. I felt very lonely, so I came."

"How nice of you!"

"You are expecting someone?"

"No—perhaps—I never know."

He had seated himself and now looked scornfully at the piece of coarse gray knitting that mother and daughter were swiftly making from heavy wool, working with long needles.

"What is that?" he asked.

"Coverlets."

"For the poor?"

"Yes, of course."

"It is very ugly."

"It is very warm."

"Possibly, but it is very ugly, especially in a Louis Fifteenth apartment, where everything else charms the eye. If not for the sake of your poor, at least for the sake of your friends, you

really ought to make your charities more elegant."

"Oh, heavens, these men!" said the countess, with a shrug of her shoulders. "Why, everyone is making this kind of coverlet just now."

"I know that; I know it only too well! One cannot make an evening call now without seeing that frightful gray stuff dragged over the prettiest gowns and the most elegant furniture. Bad taste seems to be the fashion this spring."

To judge whether he spoke the truth, the countess spread out her knitting on a silk-covered chair beside her; then she assented indifferently:

"Yes, you are right—it is ugly."

Then she resumed her work. Upon the two bent heads fell a stream of light; a rosy radiance from the lamp illumined their hair and complexions, extending to their skirts and their moving fingers. They watched their work with that attention, light but continuous, given by women to this labor of the fingers which the eye follows without a thought.

At the four corners of the room four other lamps of Chinese porcelain, borne by antique columns of gilded wood, shed upon the hangings a soft, even light, modified by lace shades thrown over the globes.

Bertin took a very low seat, a dwarf armchair, in which he could barely seat himself, but which he had always preferred when talking with the countess because it placed him almost at her feet.

"You took a long walk with Nané this afternoon in the park," said the countess.

"Yes. We chatted like old friends. I like your daughter very much. She resembles you very strongly. When she pronounces certain phrases, one would believe that you had left your voice in her mouth."

"My husband has already said that very often."

He watched the two women at work, bathed in the lamplight, and the thought that had often made him suffer, and had done so that very day—the recollection of his desolate home, still, silent and cold, whatever the weather, whatever fire might be lighted in chimney or furnace—saddened him as if he now understood his isolation for the first time.

Oh, how deeply he longed to be the husband of this woman! Once he had wanted to carry her away, to take her from that man, to steal her altogether. To-day he was jealous of him, that husband who was installed beside her forever, in the habits of her household and under the sweet influence of her presence. In looking at her he felt his heart full of old things revived, of which he wished to speak. Certainly, he still loved her very much, even a little more to-day than he had for some time; and the desire to tell her of this return of youthful feeling, which would be sure to delight her, made him wish that she would send the young girl to bed as soon as possible.

Obsessed by this strong desire to be alone with her, to sit near her and lay his head on her knee, to take the hands from which would slip the quilt for the poor, the needles, and the ball of wool, which would roll under a sofa at the end of a long, unwound thread, he looked at the time, relapsed into almost complete silence, and thought that it was a great mistake to allow

young girls to pass the evening with grown-up persons.

Presently a sound of footsteps was heard in the next room, and a servant appeared at the door announcing:

"Monsieur de Musadieu."

Olivier Bertin felt a spasm of anger, and when he shook hands with the Inspector of Fine Arts he had a great desire to take him by the shoulders and throw him into the street.

Musadieu was full of news; the ministry was about to fall, and there was a whisper of scandal about the Marquis de Rocdiane. He looked at the young girl, adding: "I will tell you about that a little later."

The countess raised her eyes to the clock and saw that it was about to strike ten.

"It is time to go to bed, my child," she said to her daughter.

Without replying, Annette folded her knitting-work, rolled up her ball of wool, kissed her mother on the cheeks, gave her hand to the two gentlemen, and left the room quietly, as if she glided away without disturbing the air as she went.

"Well, what is your scandal?" her mother demanded, as soon as she had gone.

It appeared that rumor said that the Marquis de Rocdiane, amicably separated from his wife, who paid to him an allowance that he considered insufficient, had discovered a sure if singular means to double it. The marquise, whom he had had watched, had been surprised *in flagrante delictu*, and was compelled to buy off, with an increased allowance, the legal proceedings instituted by the police commissioner.

The countess listened with curious gaze, her idle hands holding the interrupted work on her knee.

Bertin, who was still more exasperated by Musadieu's presence since Annette had gone, was incensed at this recital, and declared, with the indignation of one who had known of the scandal but did not wish to speak of it to any one, that the story was an odious falsehood, one of those shameful lies which people of their world ought neither to listen to nor repeat. He appeared greatly wrought up over the matter, as he stood leaning against the mantelpiece and speaking with the excited manner of a man disposed to make a personal question of the subject under discussion.

Rocdiane was his friend, he said; and, though he might be criticised for frivolity in certain respects, no one could justly accuse him or even suspect him of any really unworthy action. Musadieu, surprised and embarrassed, defended himself, tried to explain and to excuse himself.

"Allow me to say," he remarked at last, "that I heard this story just before I came here in the drawing-room of the Duchesse de Mortemain."

"Who told it to you? A woman, no doubt," said Bertin.

"No, not at all; it was the Marquis de Farandal."

The painter, irritated still further, retorted: "That does not astonish me—from him!"

There was a brief silence. The countess took up her work again. Presently Olivier said in a calmer voice: "I know for a fact that that story is false."

In reality he knew nothing whatever about it, having heard it mentioned then for the first time.

Musadieu thought it wise to prepare the way for his retreat, feeling the situ-

ation rather dangerous, and he was just beginning to say that he must pay a visit at the Corbelles' that evening when the Comte de Guilleroy appeared, returning from dining in the city.

Bertin sat down again, overcome, and despairing now of getting rid of the husband.

"You haven't heard, have you, of the great scandal that is running all over town this evening?" inquired the count pleasantly.

As no one answered, he continued: "It seems that Rocdiane surprised his wife in a criminal situation and has made her pay dearly for her indiscretion."

Then Bertin, with his melancholy air, with grief in voice and gesture, placing one hand on Guilleroy's shoulder, repeated in a gentle and amicable manner all that he had just said so roughly to Musadieu.

The count, half convinced, annoyed to have allowed himself to repeat so lightly a doubtful and possibly compromising thing, pleaded his ignorance and his innocence. The gossips said so many false and wicked things!

Suddenly all agreed upon this statement: the world certainly accused, suspected and calumniated with deplorable facility! All four appeared to be convinced, during the next five minutes, that all the whispered scandals were lies; that the women did not have the lovers ascribed to them; that the men never committed the sins they were accused of; and, in short, that the outward appearance of things was usually much worse than the real situation.

Bertin, who no longer felt vexed with Musadieu since De Guilleroy's arrival, was now very pleasant to him, led him to talk on his favorite subjects and opened the sluices of his eloquence. The count wore the contented air of a man who carries everywhere with him an atmosphere of peace and cordiality.

Two servants noiselessly entered the drawing-room, bearing the tea-table, on which the boiling water steamed in a pretty, shining kettle over the blue flame of an alcohol lamp.

The countess rose, prepared the hot beverage with the care and precaution we have learned from the Russians, then offered a cup to Musadieu, another to Bertin, following this with plates containing sandwiches of *pâte de foie gras* and little English and Austrian cakes.

The count approached the portable table, where was also an assortment of syrups, liqueurs and glasses. He mixed himself a drink, then discreetly disappeared into the next room.

Bertin found himself again facing Musadieu and felt once more a sudden desire to thrust outside this bore, who, now put on his mettle, talked at great length, told stories, repeated jests and made some himself. The painter glanced continually at the clock, the hands of which approached midnight. The countess noticed his glances, understood that he wished to speak to her alone, and with that ability of a clever woman of the world to change by indescribable shades of tone the whole atmosphere of a drawing-room, to make it understood, without saying anything, whether one is to remain or to go, she diffused about her, by her attitude alone, by the bored expression of her face and eyes, a chill as if she had just opened a window.

Musadieu felt this chilly current freezing his flow of ideas; and, without asking himself the reason, he felt a

sudden desire to rise and depart.

Bertin, as a matter of discretion, followed his example. The two men passed through both drawing-rooms together, followed by the countess, who talked to the painter all the while. She detained him at the threshold of the antechamber to make some trifling explanation, while Musadieu, assisted by a footman, put on his topcoat. As Madame de Guilleroy continued to talk to Bertin, the Inspector of Fine Arts, having waited some seconds before the front door, held open by another servant, decided to depart by himself rather than stand there facing the footman any longer.

The door was closed softly behind him, and the countess said to the artist in a perfectly easy tone:

"Why do you go so soon? It is not yet midnight. Stay a little longer."

They reëntered the smaller drawing-room together and seated themselves.

"My God! how that animal set my teeth on edge!" said Bertin.

"Why, pray?"

"He took you away from me a little."

"Oh, not very much."

"Perhaps not, but he irritated me."

"Are you jealous?"

"It is not being jealous to find a man a bore."

He had taken his accustomed armchair, and seated close beside her now he smoothed the folds of her robe with his fingers as he told her of the warm breath of tenderness that had passed through his heart that day.

The countess listened, surprised, charmed, and gently laid her hand on his white locks, which she caressed tenderly, as to thank him.

"I should like always to live beside you!" he sighed.

He was thinking of her husband, who had retired to rest, asleep no doubt in some neighboring chamber, and he continued:

"It is undoubtedly true that marriage is the only thing that really unites two lives."

"My poor friend!" she murmured, full of pity for him and also for herself.

He had laid his cheek against the countess' knees, and he looked up at her with a tenderness touched with sadness, less ardently than a short time before, when he had been separated from her by her daughter, her husband and Musadieu.

"Heavens! how white your hair has grown!" said the countess with a smile, running her fingers lightly over Olivier's head. "Your last black hairs have disappeared."

"Alas! I know it. Everything goes so soon!"

She was concerned lest she had made him sad.

"Oh, but your hair turned gray very early, you know," she said. "I have always known you with pepper-and-salt locks."

"Yes, that is true."

In order to dispel altogether the slight cloud of regret she had evoked, she leaned over him and, taking his head between her hands, kissed him slowly and tenderly on the forehead with long kisses that seemed as if they never would end. Then they gazed into each other's eyes, seeking therein the reflection of their mutual fondness.

"I should like so much to pass a whole day with you," Bertin continued. He felt himself tormented obscurely by an inexpressible need of close compan-

ionship. He had believed, only a short time ago, that the departure of those who had been present would suffice to realize the desire that had possessed him since morning; and now that he was alone with his mistress, now that he felt on his brow the touch of her hands, and, against his cheek, through the folds of her skirt, the warmth of her body, he felt the same agitation reawakened, the same longing for an unknown and ever-fleeting love. He now fancied that, away from that house—perhaps in the woods where they would be absolutely alone—this deep yearning of his heart would be calmed and satisfied.

"What a boy you are!" said the countess. "Why, we see each other almost every day."

He begged her to devise a plan whereby she might breakfast with him, as she had done four or five times in former days.

The countess was astonished at his caprice, so difficult to gratify now that her daughter had returned. She assured him that she would try to do it, but not before the varnishing-day reception, which would take place the following Saturday.

"And when shall I see you between then and now?" he asked.

"To-morrow evening at the Corbelles'. Come over here Thursday, at three o'clock, if you are free, and I believe that we are to dine together with the duchess on Friday."

"Yes, very well."

He rose.

"Good-by!"

"Good-by, my friend."

He remained standing, unable to decide to go, for he had said almost nothing of all that he had come to say, and his mind was still full of unexpressed thoughts, his heart still swelled with vague desires which he had not uttered.

"Good-by!" he repeated, taking her hands.

"Good-by, my friend!"

"I love you!"

She gave him one of those smiles with which a woman shows a man, in a single instant, all that she has given him.

With a throbbing heart he repeated for the third time "Good-by!" and departed.

CHAPTER IV

A DOUBLE JEALOUSY

One would have said that all the carriages in Paris were making a pilgrimage to the Palais de l'Industrie that day. As early as nine o'clock in the morning they began to drive, by way of all streets, avenues and bridges, toward that hall of the fine arts where all artistic Paris invites all fashionable Paris to be present at the pretended varnishing of three thousand four hundred pictures.

A long procession of visitors crowded

through the doors, and, disdaining the exhibition of sculpture, hastened upstairs to the picture gallery. Even while mounting the steps they raised their eyes to the canvases displayed on the walls of the staircase, where are hung the special category of decorative painters who have sent canvases of unusual proportions or works that the committee dare not refuse.

In the square salon there surged a noisy crowd. The artists, who were in evidence until evening, were easily recognized by their activity, the sonorousness of their voices and the authority of their gestures. They drew their friends by the sleeve toward the pictures, which they pointed out with the exclamations, and energetic mimicry of a connoisseur. All types of artists were to be seen—tall men with long hair, wearing soft hats of gray or black, of indescribable shapes, large and round like roofs, with their turned-down brims shadowing the wearer's whole chest. Others were short, active, slight or stocky, wearing foulard cravats and round jackets or the singular costume peculiar to this class of painters.

There was the clique of the fashionables, of the curious and of artists of the boulevard; the clique of Academicians, correct and decorated with red rosettes, enormous or microscopic, according to individual conception of elegance and good form; the clique of *bourgeois* painters, the family taking part and surrounding the father like a triumphal chorus.

On the four great walls the canvases admitted to the honor of the square salon dazzled one on entering with their brilliant tones, glittering frames, the crudity of new paint, brought out by fresh varnish, blinding under the pitiless light poured from above.

The portrait of the President of the Republic faced the entrance, while on another wall a general bedizened with gold lace, sporting a hat decorated with ostrich plumes, and wearing red cloth breeches, hung in pleasant proximity to some naked nymphs under a willow tree, and near by was a vessel in distress almost engulfed by a great wave. A bishop of the early Church excommunicating a barbarian king, an Oriental street full of dead victims of the plague and the Shade of Dante in Hell, seized and captivated the eye with irresistible fascination.

Other paintings in the immense room were a charge of cavalry; sharpshooters in a wood; cows in a pasture; two noblemen of the eighteenth century fighting a duel on a street corner; a madwoman sitting on a wall; a priest administering the last rites to a dying man; harvesters, rivers, a sunset, a moonlight effect—in short, samples of everything that artists paint, have painted and will paint until the end of the world.

Olivier, in the midst of a group of celebrated brother painters, members of the Institute and of the jury, was exchanging opinions with them. He was oppressed by a certain uneasiness, a dissatisfaction with his own exhibited work, of the success of which he was very doubtful, in spite of the warm congratulations he had received.

Suddenly he sprang forward. The Duchesse de Mortemain had appeared at the main entrance.

"Hasn't the countess arrived yet?" she inquired of Bertin.

"I have not seen her."

"And Monsieur de Musadieu?"

"I have not seen him either."

"He promised me to be here at ten o'clock, at the top of the stairs, to show me the galleries."

"Will you permit me to take his place, duchess?"

"No, no. Your friends need you. We shall see each other again very soon, for I shall expect you to lunch with us."

Musadieu hastened toward them. He had been detained for some minutes in the hall of sculpture, and excused himself, breathless already.

"This way, duchess, this way," said he. "Let us begin at the right."

They were just disappearing among the throng when the Comtesse de Guilleroy, leaning on her daughter's arm, entered and looked about her in search of Olivier Bertin.

He saw them and hastened to meet them. As he greeted the two ladies he said:

"How charming you look to-day. Really, Nanette is growing very pretty. She has actually changed in a week."

He was looking at her with his observant eye and added: "The lines of her face are softer, yet more expressive; her complexion is clearer. She is already something less of a little girl and somewhat more of a Parisian."

Suddenly he bethought himself of the grand affair of the day.

"Let us begin at the right," said he, "and we shall soon overtake the duchess."

The countess, well informed on all matters connected with painting, and as interested as if she herself were an exhibitor, inquired: "What do they say of the exposition?"

"A fine one," Bertin replied. "There is a remarkable Bonnat, two excellent things by Carolus Duran, an admirable Puvis de Chavannes, a very new and astonishing Roll, an exquisite Gervex and many others by Béraud, Cazin, Duez—in short, a heap of good things."

"And you?" said the countess.

"Oh, they compliment me, but I am not satisfied."

"You never are satisfied."

"Yes, sometimes. But to-day I really feel that I am right."

"Why?"

"I do not know."

"Let us go and see it."

When they arrived before Bertin's picture—two little peasant girls taking a bath in a brook—they found a group admiring it. The countess was delighted and whispered: "It is simply a delicious bit—a gem! You never have done anything better."

Bertin pressed close to her, loving her and thanking her for every word that calmed his suffering and healed his aching heart. Through his mind ran arguments to convince him that she was right, that she must judge accurately with the observation of an intelligent Parisian. He forgot, so desirous was he to reassure himself that for at least twelve years he had justly reproached her for admiring too much the dainty trifles, the elegant nothings, the sentimentalities and nameless trivialities of the passing fancy of the day, and never art, art alone, art detached from the popular ideas, tendencies and prejudices.

"Let us go on," said he, drawing them away from his picture. He led them for a long time from gallery to gallery, showing them notable canvases and ex-

laining their subjects, happy to be with hem.

"What time is it?" the countess asked uddenly.

"Half-past twelve."

"Oh, let us hasten to luncheon, then. The duchess must be waiting for us at edoyen's, where she charged me to ring you, in case we should not meet er in the galleries."

The restaurant, in the midst of a ttle island of trees and shrubs, seemed ke an overflowing hive. A confused um of voices, of calls, the rattling of lates and glasses came from the open indows and large doors. The tables, et close together and filled with people ating, extended in long rows right and ft of a narrow passage, up and down hich ran the distracted waiters, loaded own with dishes filled with meat, fish r fruit.

Under the circular gallery there was seething mass of men and women. very one there laughed, called out, rank and ate, excited by the wines and undated by one of those waves of joy iat sweep over Paris, on certain days, ong with the sunshine.

An attendant showed the countess, nnette and Bertin upstairs into a pri- ate room, where the duchess awaited em. As they entered the painter ob- rved, beside his aunt, the Marquis Farandal, attentive and smiling, and tending his hand to receive the para- ls and wraps of the countess and her ughter. He felt so annoyed at this at he suddenly desired to say some- ing rude and irritating.

The duchess explained the meeting th her nephew and the departure of usadieu, who had been carried off by e Minister of the Fine Arts, and Ber- tin, at the thought that this insipidly good-looking marquis might marry Annette, that he had come here only to see her, and that he regarded her already as destined to share his home, unnerved and revolted him, as if some one had ignored his own rights—sacred and mysterious rights.

As soon as they were at table, the marquis, who sat beside the young girl, occupied himself in talking to her with the devoted air of a man authorized to pay his addresses.

He had a peculiar expression, which seemed to the painter bold and inquisitive. He smiled in a tender, self-satisfied manner and with a familiar and officious gallantry. In manner and word appeared already something of decision, as if he were about to announce that he had won the prize.

The duchess and the countess seemed to protect and approve this attitude of a pretender and exchanged glances of complicity.

As soon as luncheon was finished the party returned to the exposition. There was such a dense crowd in the galleries, it seemed impossible to make one's way through it. A warm odor of humanity, a stale smell of old gowns and coats made an atmosphere at once heavy and sickening. No one looked at the pictures any longer, but at faces and toilets, looking for prominent personages, and at times came a great jostling of the crowd as it was forced to give way before the high double ladder of the varnishers, who cried: "Make way, messieurs! Make way, mesdames!"

At the end of ten minutes the countess and Olivier found themselves separated from the others. He wished to find them immediately, but, leaning on

his arm, the countess said: "Are we not very well off as it is? Let them go, since it was agreed that if we lost sight of each other we should meet again in the buffet at four o'clock."

"That is true," he replied.

But he was absorbed by the idea that the marquis was with Annette and continuing his attempts to please her with his polished impertinence.

"You still love me then?" murmured the countess.

"Yes, certainly," he replied with a preoccupied air, trying to catch a glimpse of the marquis's gray hat over the heads of the crowd.

Feeling that he was preoccupied and wishing to lead him back to her own train of thought, the countess continued:

"If you only knew how I adore your picture this year! It is certainly your *chef-d'œuvre.*"

He smiled suddenly, forgetting the young people in remembering his anxiety of the morning.

"Do you really think so?" he asked.

"Yes, I prefer it to all the rest."

With artful wheedling, she crowned him anew, having been aware for some time that nothing has a stronger effect on an artist than tender and persistent flattery. Captivated, cheered, encouraged by her sweet words, he began to chat again, seeing and hearing only her in that surging throng.

By way of expressing his thanks, he murmured in her ear: "I have a mad desire to embrace you!"

A warm wave of emotion swept over her, and, raising her sparkling eyes to his, she repeated her question: "Then you still love me?"

He replied with the intonation she wished to hear and which she had not heard before:

"Yes, I love you, my dear Any."

"Come to see me often in the evenings," she said. "Now that I have my daughter I shall not go out very much."

Since she had recognized in him this unexpected reawakening of tenderness, her heart was stirred with great happiness. With Olivier's silvery hair and the calming touch of time she had less dread of his being fascinated by another woman, but she was terribly afraid that he might marry from a sheer horror of loneliness. This fear, which was of long standing, increased constantly and set her wits to work to contriving plans whereby she might have him near her as much as possible and prevent his spending long evenings alone in the chill silence of his empty rooms. Not being always able to attract and hold him, she would suggest amusements for him, sent him to the theatre, forced him to go into society, being better pleased to know that he was surrounded by other women than alone in his gloomy house.

She resumed, answering his secret thought: "Ah, if I could only have you always with me, how I should spoil you! Promise me to come often, since I hardly go out at all now."

"I promise it."

At that moment a voice murmured "Mamma!" in her ear.

The countess started and turned. Annette, the duchess and the marquis had just rejoined them.

"It is four o'clock," said the duchess. "I am very tired and I wish to go now."

"I will go, too; I have had enough of it," said the countess.

They reached the interior stairway which divides the galleries where the

rawings and water-colors are hung, verlooking the immense garden enlosed in glass, where the sculptures re exhibited.

From the platform of this stairway ney could see from one end to the ther of this great conservatory, filled ith statues set up along the pathway round large green shrubs, and below nem the crowd which covered the aths like a moving black wave. The arbles rose from this mass of dark ats and shoulders, piercing it in a housand places and seeming almost minous in their dazzling whiteness.

As Bertin took leave of the ladies the door of exit Madame de Guilroy whispered:

"Then—will you come this evening?"

"Yes, certainly."

Bertin reëntered the exposition to lk with the artists over the impresons of the day.

Painters and sculptors stood talking groups around the statues and in ont of the buffet, upholding or attackg the same ideas that were discussed very year, using the same arguments er almost exactly similar works. Olier, who usually took a lively share in ese disputes, being quick at repartee d clever in disconcerting attacks, beles having a reputation as an ingenious eorist of which he was proud, tried urge himself to take an active part the debates, but the things he said terested him no more than those he ard, and he longed to go away, to ten no more, to understand no more, owing beforehand as he did all that y one could say on these ancient estions of art, of which he knew all les.

He loved these things, however, and had loved them until now in an almost exclusive way; but to-day he was distracted by one of those slight but persistent preoccupations, one of those petty anxieties which are so small we ought not to allow ourselves to be troubled by them, but which, in spite of all we do or say, prick through our thoughts like an invisible thorn buried in the flesh.

He had even forgotten his anxiety over his little peasant bathers in the remembrance of the offensive behavior of the marquis toward Annette. What did it matter to him, after all? Had he any right? Why should he wish to prevent this precious marriage, arranged beforehand and suitable from every point of view? But no reasoning could efface that impression of uneasiness and discontent which had seized him when he beheld Farandal talking and smiling like an accepted suitor, caressing with his glances the fair face of the young girl.

When he entered the countess' drawing-room that evening and found her alone with her daughter, continuing by the lamplight their knitting for the poor, he had great difficulty in preventing himself from saying sneering things about the marquis and opening Annette's eyes to the man's real vulgarity, veiled by a mask of elegance and good form.

For some time past, during these after-dinner evening visits, he had often allowed himself to lapse into occasional sleepy silence and to fall into the easy attitudes of an old friend who does not stand on ceremony. But now he seemed suddenly to rouse himself and to show the alertness of a man who does his best to be agreeable, who is

interested in what he is going to say and who, before certain persons, seek for the most brilliant and choice manner best phrases in which to express their ideas and render them attractive. No longer did he allow the conversation to lag, but did his best to keep it bright and interesting, and when he had made the countess and her daughter laugh gaily, when he felt that he had touched their emotions or when they ceased to work in order to listen to him he felt a thrill of pleasure, an assurance of success, which rewarded him for his efforts.

He came now whenever he knew they were alone, and never, perhaps, had he passed such delightful evenings.

Madame de Guilleroy, whose continual fears were soothed by this assiduity, made fresh efforts to attract him and to keep him near her. She refused invitations to dinners in the city, she did not go to balls, nor to the theatre, in order to have the joy of throwing into the telegraph-box, on going out at three o'clock, a little blue telegram which said: "We shall see yo soon." At first, wishing to give him earlier the *tête-à-tête* that he desired, she had sent her daughter to bed at ten o'clock. Then when he had on one occasion appeared surprised at this and had begged laughingly that Annette should not be treated any longer like a naughty little girl, she had allowed her daughter a quarter of an hour's grace, then half an hour, and finally a whole hour. Bertin never remained long after the young girl had retired; it was as if half the charm that held him there had departed with her. He would then take the little low seat that he preferred, and sitting down beside the countess would lay his cheek against her knee with a caressing movement. She would give him one of her hands, which he held in his own, and the fever of his spirit would suddenly be abated; he ceased to talk, and appeared to find repose in tender silence.

Little by little the countess, with her keen feminine instinct, saw that Annette attracted him almost as much as she herself. This did not anger her; she was glad that in their midst he could find something of that domestic happiness which he lacked; and she imprisoned him between them, as it were, playing the part of tender mother in such a way that he might almost believe himself the young girl's father; and a new bond of tenderness was added to all that already held him to this household.

Her personal vanity, always alert, but disturbed since she had felt in several ways, like almost invisible pin-pricks, the innumerable attacks of advancing age, took on a new allurement. In order to become as slender as Annette, she continued to drink nothing, and the real slimness of her figure gave her the appearance of a young girl. When her back was turned one could hardly distinguish her from Annette; but her face showed the effect of this régime. The plump flesh began to be wrinkled and took on a yellowish tint which rendered more dazzling by contrast the superb freshness of the young girl's complexion. Then the countess began to make up her face with the methods of an actress, and, though in broad daylight she produced an effect that was slightly artificial, in the evening her complexion had that charmingly soft tint obtained

women who know how to make up
ell.
The realization of her fading beauty,
d the employment of artificial aid
restore it, somewhat changed her
bits. She avoided comparison with
r daughter in the full light of day as
uch as possible, but rather sought
by lamplight, which, if anything,
owed her off to greater advantage.
hen she was fatigued, pale, and felt
at she looked older than usual, she
d convenient headaches which obliged
r to excuse herself from going to
lls and theatres; but on days when
e knew she looked well she triumphed
ain and played the elder sister with
e grave modesty of a little mother.
order always to wear gowns like
ose of her daughter, she made An-
tte wear toilettes suitable for a fully-
own young woman, a trifle too old
r her; and Annette, who showed more
d more plainly her joyous and laugh-
g disposition, wore them with a
arkling vivacity that rendered her still
ore attractive. She lent herself with
her heart to the coquettish arts of
r mother, acting with her, as if by
tinct graceful little domestic scenes;
e knew when to embrace her at the
ective moment, how to clasp her
derly round the waist, and to show
a movement, a caress, or some in-
ious pose, how pretty both were and
w much they resembled each other.
From seeing the two so much to-
her, and from continually comparing
em, Olivier Bertin sometimes actually
nfused them in his own mind. Some-
nes, when Annette spoke, and he hap-
ned to be looking elsewhere, he was
compelled to ask: "Which of you said that?" He often amused himself by playing this game of confusion when all three were alone in the drawing-room with the Louis XV tapestries. He would close his eyes and beg them to ask him the same question, the one after the other, and then change the order of the interrogations, so that he might recognize their voices. They did this with so much cleverness in imitating each other's intonations, in saying the same phrases with the same accents, that often he could not tell which spoke. In fact, they had come to speak so much alike that the servants answered "Yes, madame" to the daughter and "Yes, mademoiselle" to the mother.

From imitating each other's voices and movements for amusement, they acquired such a similarity of gait and gesture that Monsieur de Guilleroy himself, when he saw one or the other pass through the shadowy end of the drawing-room, confounded them for an instant and asked: "Is that you, Annette, or is it your mamma?"

From this resemblace, natural and assumed, was engendered in the mind and heart of the painter a strange impression of a double entity, old and young, wise yet ignorant, two bodies made, the one after the other, with the same flesh; in fact, the same woman continued, but rejuvenated, having become once more what she was formerly. Thus he lived near them, shared between them, uneasy, troubled, feeling his old ardor for the mother awakened together with an indefinable affection for the daughter.

PART II

CHAPTER I

A WILLING ENVOY

My Friend: My mother has just died at Roncières. We shall leave here at midnight. Do not come, for we have told no one. But pity me and think of me. Your Any.

July 21, 12 M.

My Poor Friend: I should have gone, notwithstanding what you wrote, if I had not become used to regarding all your wishes as commands. I have thought of you with poignant grief ever since last night. I think of that silent journey you made, sitting opposite your daughter and your husband, in that dimly-lighted carriage, which bore you toward your dead. I could see all three of you under the oil lamp, you weeping and Annette sobbing. I saw your arrival at the station, the horrible drive to the castle which you entered in the midst of a group of servants, saw your rush up the stairs toward that room, toward that bed where she lies, your first look at her, and your kiss on her thin, motionless face. And I thought of your heart, your poor heart—that poor heart, part of which belongs to me and which is breaking, which suffers so much, which stifles you, making me suffer also at this moment.

With profound pity, I kiss your eyes filled with tears. Olivier.

Roncières, July 24.

Your letter would have done me good, my friend, if anything could do me good in the terrible grief that has come upon me. We buried her yesterday, and since her poor lifeless body has gone out of this house it seems to me that I am alone in the world. We love our mothers almost without knowing or feeling it, for such love is as natural as it is to live, and we do not realize how deep-rooted is that love until the moment of final separation. No other affection is comparable to that, for all others come by chance, while this begins at birth; all the others are brought to us later by the accidents of life, while this has lived in our very blood since our first day on earth. And then, it is not only a mother we lose, but our childhood itself, which half disappears, for our life of young girlhood belonged to her as much as to ourselves. She alone knew it as we knew it; she knew about innumerable things, remote, insignificant and dear, which are and which were the first sweet emotions of our heart. To her alone I could still say: "Do you remember, mother, the day when——? Do you remember, mother, the china doll that grandmother gave me?" Both of us murmured to each other a long, sweet chaplet of trifling childish memories, which no one on earth now knows of but myself. So it is a part of myself that is dead—the older, the better portion. I have lost the poor heart wherein the little girl I was once still lived. Now no one knows her any more; no one remembers

ıe little Anne, her short skirts, her ughter and her little ways.

And a day will come—and perhaps is not far away—when in my turn too shall go, leaving my dear Anette alone in the world, as mamma as left me to-day. How sad all this , how hard, and cruel! Yet one never inks about it; we do not see death l around taking some one every inant, as it will soon take us. If we ıould look at it, if we should think it, if we were not thoughtless, giddy, ıd blinded by all that passes before , we could no longer live, for the ght of this endless massacre would ive us mad.

I am so crushed, so despairing, that have no longer strength to do anying. Day and night I think of my ıor mamma, nailed in that box, buried neath that earth, in that field, under e rain, of that dear old face, which used to kiss with so much happiness, ıd which is now only a mass of frightl decay! Oh, what horror!

When I lost papa, I was just mared, and I did not feel all these things I do to-day. Yes, pity me, think of e, write to me. I need you so much st now. ANNE.

Paris, July 25.

MY POOR FRIEND: Your grief gives e horrible pain, and life no longer ems rosy to me. Since your departure am lost, abandoned, without ties or fuge. Everything fatigues me, bores d irritates me. I am ceaselessly thinkg of you and Annette; I feel that you e both far, far away when I need you ar me so much.

It is extraordinary how far away from you seem to be, and how I miss you. Never, even in my younger days, have you been my all, as you are at this moment. I have for some time foreseen this shock, which must be a sunstroke in Indian summer. What I feel is so very strange that I wish to tell you about it. Only imagine, since your absence I cannot take walks any more! Formerly, and even during the last few months, I enjoyed starting out alone and strolling along the street, amusing myself by looking at people and things, pleased at the mere sight of everything and the exercise of walking. I would go along not knowing whither, just for the sake of walking, breathing, dreaming. Now, I can no longer do this. As soon as I reach the street a feeling of distress comes over me, like the fear of a blind man that has lost his dog. I become uneasy, exactly like a traveler that has lost his way in the wood, and I am compelled to return home. Paris seems empty, frightful, alarming. I ask myself: "Where am I going?" I answer myself: "Nowhere, since I am still walking." Well, I simply cannot walk without some object. The bare thought of walking straight before me wearies me and bores me inexpressibly. Then I take my melancholy to the club.

And do you know why? For the sole reason that you are no longer here. I am certain of this. When I know that you are in Paris, my walks are no longer useless, for it is possible that I may meet you in the first street I turn into. I can go anywhere because you may be anywhere. If I do not see you, I may at least find Annette, who is an emanation of yourself. You and she fill the streets full of hope for me—the hope of recognizing you, whether you approach me from a distance, or whether

I divine your identity in following you. And then the city becomes charming to me, and the women whose figures resemble yours stir my heart with all the life of the streets, hold my attention, occupy my eyes, and give me a sort of hunger to see you.

You will consider me very selfish, my poor friend, to speak to you in this way of the solitude of an old cooing pigeon when you are shedding such bitter tears. Pardon me! I am so used to being spoiled by you that I cry "Help! help!" when I have you no longer.

I kiss your feet so that you may have pity on me. OLIVIER.

Roncières, July 30.

MY FRIEND: Thanks for your letter. I need so much to know that you love me! I have just passed some frightful days. Indeed, I really thought that grief would kill me in my turn.

It was like a block of suffering in my breast, growing larger and larger, stifling me, strangling me. The physician that was called to treat me for the nervous attacks, which recurred four or five times a day, injected morphine, which made me almost wild, and the hot weather we have had aggravated my condition and threw me into a state of over-excitement that was almost delirium. I am a little more calm since the great storm of Friday. I must tell you that after the day of the funeral I could weep no more, but during the storm, the approach of which upset me, I suddenly felt the tears beginning to flow from my eyes, slow, small, burning. Oh, those first tears, how they hurt me! They seemed to tear me, as if they had claws, and my throat was so choked that I could hardly breathe. Then the tears came faster, larger, cooler. Then ran from my eyes as from a spring, and came so fast that my handkerchief was saturated and I had to take another. The great block of grief seemed to soften and to flow away through my eyes.

From that moment I have been weeping from morning till night, and that is saving me. One would really end by going mad or dying, if one could not cry. I am very lonely, too. My husband is making some little trips through the country, and I insisted that he should take Annette with him, to distract and console her a little. They go in the carriage or on horseback as far as eight or ten leagues from Roncières, and she returns to me rosy with youth, in spite of her sadness, her eyes shining with life, animated by the country air and the excursion she has had. How beautiful it is to be at that age! I think we shall remain here a fortnight or three weeks longer; then, although it will be August, we shall return to Paris for the reason you know.

I send to you all that remains to me of my heart. ANY.

Paris, August 4th.

I can bear this no longer, my dear friend; you must come back, for something is certainly going to happen to me. I ask myself whether I am not ill. I have such a distaste for everything I used to take pleasure in doing, or did with indifferent resignation. For one thing, it is so warm in Paris that every night means a Turkish bath of eight or nine hours. I get up overcome by the fatigue of this sleep in a hot bath, and for an hour or two I walk

bout before a clean canvas, with the ntention of drawing something. But ind, eye, and hand are all empty! I m no longer a painter! This futile efort to work is exasperating. I summon y models; I place them, and as I ave painted all their poses, gestures, nd expressions to satiety, I make them ress again and let them go. Frankly, can no longer see anything new, and suffer from this as if I were blind. What is it? Is it fatigue of the eye or the brain, exhaustion of the artistic culty or of the optic nerve? Who nows? It seems to me that I have eased to discover anything in the unplored corner that I have been pertted to visit. I no longer perceive anying but that which all the world nows; I do the things that all poor inters have done; I have only one bject now, and only the observation a vulgar pedant. Once upon a time, nd not so very long ago, either, the mber of new subjects seemed to me limited, and I had such a variety of ays of depicting them that it was diffilt for me to make a choice. But now, as! Suddenly the world of half-seen bjects has become depopulated, my rsuit is fruitless and unfruitful. The ople that pass do not mean anything me. I no longer find in every human ing the character and savor which ce I loved to discern and portray. believe, however, that I could make very pretty portrait of your daughter. is because she resembles you so much at I confound you both in my mind? es, perhaps.

Well, then, after forcing myself to etch a man or a woman who does t resemble any of the familiar models, decide to go and breakfast somewhere, for I no longer have the courage to sit down alone in my own dining-room. The Boulevard Malesherbes seems like a forest path imprisoned in a dead city. All the houses smell empty. On the street the sprinklers throw showers of white rain, splashing the wooden pavement whence rises the vapor of damp tar and stable refuse; and from one end to the other of the long descent from the Parc Monceau to Saint Augustin, one sees five or six black forms, unimportant passers, tradesmen or domestics. The shadow of the plane-trees at their base and on the burning sidewalks makes a curious spot, looking almost like liquid, as if water spilled there were drying. The stillness of the leaves on the branches, and of their gray silhouettes on the asphalt, expresses the fatigue of the roasting city, slumbering and perspiring like a workman asleep on a bench in the sun. Yes, she perspires, the beggar, and she smells frightfully through her sewer openings, though the vent-holes of sinks and kitchens, the streams through which the filth of her streets is running. Then I think of those summer mornings in your orchard full of little wild-flowers that scent the air with a suggestion of honey. Then discouraged already, I enter the restaurant where bald, fat, tired-looking men are eating, with half-opened waistcoats and moist, shining foreheads. The food shows the effect of heat—the melon growing soft under the ice, the soft bread, the flabby filet, the warmed-over vegetables, the rancid cheese, the fruits ripened on the premises. I go out, nauseated, and go home to try to sleep a little until the hour for dinner, which I take at the club.

There I always find Adelmans, Mal-

dant, Rocdiane, Landa, and many others, who bore and weary me as much as hand-organs. Each one has his own little tune, or tunes, which I have heard for fifteen years, and they play them all together every evening in that club, which is apparently a place where one goes to be entertained. Some one should change my generation for me, for my eyes, my ears, and my mind have had enough of it. They still make conquests, however, they boast of them and congratulate one another on them!

After yawning as many times as there are minutes between eight o'clock and midnight, I go home and go to bed, and while I undress I think that the same thing will begin over again the next day.

Yes, my dear friend, I am at the age when a bachelor's life becomes intolerable, because there is nothing new for me under the sun. An unmarried man should be young, curious, eager. When one is no longer all that, it becomes dangerous to remain free. Heavens! how I loved my liberty, long ago, before I loved you more! How burdensome it is to me to-day! For an old bachelor like me, liberty is an empty thing, empty everywhere; it is the path to death, with nothing in it to prevent one from seeing the end; it is the ceaseless query: "What shall I do? Whom can I go to see, so that I shall not be alone?" And I go from one friend to another, from one handshake to the next, begging for a little friendship. I gather up crumbs, but they do not make a loaf. You, I have you, my friend, but you do not belong to me. Perhaps it is because of you that I suffer this distress, for it is the longing for your presence, for the same roof over our heads, for the same walls inclosing our lives, the same interests binding our hearts together, the need of that community of hopes, griefs, pleasures, joys, sadness, and also of material things, that fills me with so much yearning. I long to breathe forever the same air that you breathe, to share everything with you, to possess nothing that does not belong to both of us, to feel that all which makes up my own life belongs to you as much as to me—the glass from which I drink, the chair on which I sit, the bread I eat and the fire that warms me.

Adieu! Return soon. I suffer too much when you are far away. OLIVIER.

Roncières, August 8th.

My friend, I am ill, and so fatigued that you would not recognize me at all. I believe that I have wept too much. I must rest a little before I return, for I do not wish you to see me as I am. My husband sets out for Paris the day after to-morrow, and will give you news of us. He expects to take you to dinner somewhere, and charges me to ask you to wait for him at your house about seven o'clock.

As for me, as soon as I feel a little better, as soon as I have no more this corpse-like face which frightens me, I will return to be near you. In all the world, I have only Annette and you, and I wish to offer to each of you all that I can give without robbing the other. ANY.

When he received this letter announcing the still delayed return, Olivier was seized with an immoderate desire to take a carriage to the railway station to catch a train for Roncières; then, thinking that M. de Guilleroy must re-

turn the next day, he resigned himself, and even began to wish for the arrival of the husband with almost as much impatience as if it were that of the wife herself.

Never had he liked Guilleroy as well as during those twenty-four hours of waiting. When he saw him approach, he rushed toward him, with hands extended, exclaiming:

"Ah, dear friend! how happy I am to see you!"

The other also seemed very glad, delighted above all things to return to Paris, for life had not been gay in Normandy during the three weeks he had passed there.

The two men sat down on a little two-seated sofa in a corner of the studio, under a canopy of Oriental stuffs, and again shook hands with mutual sympathy.

"And the countess?" asked Bertin, "how is she?"

"Not very well. She has been very much affected, and is recovering too slowly. I must confess that I am a little anxious about her."

"But why does she not return?"

"I know nothing about it. It was impossible for me to induce her to return here."

"What does she do all day?"

"Oh, heavens! She weeps, and thinks of her mother. That is not good for her. I should like her very much to decide on taking a change of air, and leaving the place where that happened, you understand?"

"And Annette?"

"Oh, she is a flower in bloom."

Olivier smiled with joy.

"Was she very much grieved?" he asked again.

"Yes, very much, very much, but you know that grief at eighteen years does not last long."

After a silence Guilleroy resumed:

"Where shall we dine, my dear fellow? I need to be cheered up, to hear some noise and see some action."

"Well, at this season, it seems to me that the Café des Ambassadeurs is the right place."

So they set out, arm in arm, toward the Champs-Elysées. Guilleroy, excited by the feeling that stirs all Parisians when they return, and to whom the city, after every absence, seems rejuvenated and full of possible surprises, asked the painter a thousand questions about what people had been doing and saying; and Olivier, after indifferent replies which betrayed all the boredom of his solitude, spoke of Roncières, tried to find in this man, to gather round him that almost tangible something left with us by persons with whom we have recently been associated, that subtle emanation of another that one carries away when leaving them, which remains with us a few hours and evaporates amid new surroundings.

The heavy sky of a summer evening hung over the city and over the great avenue where, under the trees, the gay refrains of open-air concerts were beginning to sound. The two men, seated on the balcony of the Café des Ambassadeurs, looked down upon the still empty benches and chairs of the inclosure up to the little stage, where the singers, in the mingled light of electric globes and fading day, displayed their striking costumes and their rosy complexions. Odors of frying, of sauces, of hot food, floated in the slight breezes from the chestnut-trees, and when a

woman passed, seeking her reserved chair, followed by a man in a black coat, she diffused on her way the fresh perfume of her dress and her person.

Guilleroy, who was radiant, murmured:

"Oh, I would rather be here than in the country!"

"And I," Bertin replied, "should prefer to be there rather than here."

"Nonsense!"

"Heavens, yes! I find Paris tainted this summer."

"Oh, well, my dear fellow, but it is always Paris!"

The deputy seemed to be enjoying his day, one of those rare days of effervescence and gaiety in which grave men do foolish things. He looked at two *cocottes* dining at a neighboring table with three thin young men, superlatively correct, and he slyly questioned Olivier about all the well-known girls, whose names were heard every day. Then he murmured in a tone of deep regret:

"You are lucky to have remained a bachelor. You can do and see many things."

But the painter did not agree with him, and, as a man will do when haunted by a persistent idea, he took Guilleroy into his confidence on the subject of his sadness and isolation. When he had said everything, had recited to the end his litany of melancholy, and, urged by the longing to relieve his heart, had confessed naïvely how much he had longed for the love and companionship of a woman installed in his home, the count, in his turn, admitted that marriage had its advantages. Recovering his parliamentary eloquence in order to sing the praises of his domestic happiness, he eulogized the countess in the highest terms, to which Olivier listened gravely with frequent nods of approval.

Happy to hear her spoken of, but jealous of that intimate happiness which Guilleroy praised as a matter of duty, the painter finally murmured, with sincere conviction:

"Yes, indeed, you were lucky!"

The deputy, flattered, assented to this; then he resumed:

"I should like very much to see her return; indeed, I am a little anxious about her just now. Why, since you are bored in Paris, you might go to Roncières and bring her back. She will listen to you, for you are her best friend; while a husband—you know——"

Delighted, Olivier replied: "I ask nothing better. But do you think it would not annoy her to see me arriving in that abrupt way?"

"No, not at all. Go, by all means, my dear fellow."

"Well, then, I will. I will leave tomorrow by the one o'clock train. Shall I send her a telegram?"

"No, I will attend to that. I will telegraph, so that you will find a carriage at the station."

As they had finished dinner, they strolled again up the Boulevard, but in half an hour the count suddenly left the painter, under the pretext of an urgent affair that he had quite forgotten.

CHAPTER II

SPRINGTIME AND AUTUMN

THE countess and her daughter, dressed in black crape, had just seated themselves opposite each other at breakfast in the large dining-room at Roncières. The portraits of many ancestors, crudely painted, one in a cuirass, another in a tight-fitting coat, the former a powdered officer of the French Guards, the latter a colonel of the Restoration, hung in line on the walls, a collection of deceased Guilleroys, in old frames from which the gilding was peeling. Two servants, stepping softly, began to serve the two silent women, and the flies made a little cloud of black specks, dancing and buzzing around the crystal chandelier that hung over the centre of the table.

"Open the windows," said the countess, "it is a little cool here."

The three long windows, reaching from the floor to the ceiling, and large as bay-windows, were opened wide. A breath of soft air, bearing the odor of warm grass and the distant sounds of the country, swept in suddenly through these openings, mingling with the slightly damp air of the room, inclosed by the thick walls of the castle.

"Ah, that is good!" said Annette, taking a full breath.

The eyes of the two women had turned toward the outside and now gazed out beneath the blue sky, lightly veiled by the midday haze at the long verdant lawns of the park, with its groups of trees here and there, and its perspective opening on a yellow expanse of country, illuminated as far as the eye could see by the golden gleam of ripe grain.

"We will take a long walk after breakfast," said the countess. "We might walk as far as Berville, along the river, for it would be too warm on the plain."

"Yes, mamma, and let us take Julio to scare up some partridges."

"You know that your father forbids it."

"Oh, but since papa is in Paris!—it is so amusing to see Julio setting. There he is now, worrying the cows! Oh, how funny he is!"

Pushing back her chair, she jumped up and ran to the window, calling out: "Get them, Julio! Get them!"

Upon the lawn three heavy cows, forged with grass and overcome with heat, lay on their sides, their bellies rounded from the pressure of the earth. Rushing from one to another, barking and bounding wildly, in a sort of mad abandon, partly real, partly feigned, a shooting dog, a slender, white and red spaniel, whose curly ears flapped at every bound, was trying to rouse the three big beasts, which did not wish to get up. It was evidently the dog's favorite sport, with which he amused himself whenever he saw the cows lying down. Irritated, but not frightened, they gazed at him with their large, moist eyes, turning their heads to watch him.

Annette, from her window, cried:

"Fetch, them, Julio, fetch them!"

The excited spaniel, growing bolder, barked louder and ventured close be-

hind them, snapping as though about to bite them. They began to grow uneasy, and the nervous twitching of their skin, to get rid of the flies, became more frequent and protracted.

Suddenly the dog, carried along by the impetus of a rush that he could not check in time, bounded so close to one cow that, in order not to fall against her, he was obliged to jump over her. Startled by the bound, the heavy animal took fright, and first raising her head she finally raised herself slowly on her four legs, sniffing loudly. Seeing her erect, the other two immediately got up also, and Julio began to prance around them in a dance of triumph, while Annette praised him.

"Bravo, Julio, bravo!"

"Come," said the countess, "come to breakfast, my child."

But the young girl, shading her eyes with one hand, announced:

"There comes a telegraph messenger!"

Along the invisible path among the wheat and the oats a blue blouse appeared to be gliding along the top of the grain, and it came toward the castle with the firm step of a man.

"Oh, heavens!" murmured the countess; "I hope he does not bring bad news!"

She was still shaken with that terror which remains with us a long time after the death of some loved one has been announced by a telegram. Now she could not remove the gummed band to open the little blue paper without feeling her fingers tremble and her soul agitated, believing that from those folds which it took so long to open would come a grief that would cause her tears to flow afresh.

Annette, on the contrary, full of girlish curiosity, was delighted to meet with the unknown mystery that comes to all of us at times. Her heart, which life had just saddened for the first time, could anticipate only something joyful from the black and ominous bag hanging from the side of the mail-carrier, who saw so many emotions through the city streets and the country lanes.

The countess ceased to eat, concentrating her thoughts on the man who was approaching, bearer of a few written words that might wound her as if a knife had been thrust in her throat. The anguish of having known that experience made her breathless, and she tried to guess what this hurried message might be. About what? From whom? The thought of Olivier flashed through her mind. Was he ill? Dead, perhaps, too!

The ten minutes she had to wait seemed interminable to her; then, when she had torn open the despatch and recognized the name of her husband, she read: "I telegraph to tell you that our friend Bertin leaves for Roncières on the one o'clock train. Send phaëton station. Love."

"Well, mamma?" said Annette.

"Monsieur Olivier Bertin is coming to see us."

"Ah, how lucky! When?"

"Very soon."

"At four o'clock?"

"Yes."

"Oh, how kind he is!"

But the countess had turned pale, for a new anxiety had lately troubled her, and the sudden arrival of the painter seemed to her as painful a menace as anything she might have been able to foresee.

"You will go to meet him with the carriage," said she to her daughter.

"And will you not come, too, mamma?"

"No, I will wait for you here."

"Why? That will hurt him."

"I do not feel very well."

"You wished to walk as far as Berville just now."

"Yes, but my breakfast has made me feel ill."

"You will feel better between now and the time to go."

"No, I am going up to my room. Let me know as soon as you get back."

"Yes, mamma."

After giving orders that the phaëton should be ready at the proper hour, and that a room be prepared, the countess returned to her own room, and shut herself in.

A desire to flee seized her, so much did she fear his first look. She would have preferred to wait another week or two. In a week, with care, one may change the face completely, since women, even when young and in good health, under the slightest influence may become unrecognizable from one day to another. But the idea of appearing in broad daylight before Olivier, in the open country, in the heat of August, beside Annette, so fresh and blooming, disturbed her so much that she decided immediately not to go to the station, but to await him in the half-darkened drawing-room.

She went up to her room and fell into a dream. Breaths of warm air stirred the curtains from time to time; the song of the crickets filled the air. Never before had she felt so sad. It was no longer the great grief that had shattered her heart, overwhelming her before the soulless body of her beloved old mother. That grief, which she had believed incurable, had in a few days become softened and was now but a sorrow of remembrance, but now she felt herself swept away on a deep wave of melancholy into which she had entered gradually and from which she never would emerge.

She felt an almost irresistible desire to weep—and would not. Every time she felt her eyelids grow moist she wiped them quickly, rose, paced about the room, looked out into the park and gazed at the tall trees, watched the slow, black flight of the crows against the background of blue sky. Then she passed before her mirror, judged of her appearance with one glance, effaced the trace of a tear in the corner of her eye with the powder puff and looked at the clock, trying to guess whereabouts on the road he was.

Like all women who are carried away by a distress of soul, whether real or unreasonable, she clung to him with frantic affection. Was he not her all—all, everything, more than life, all that any one must be who has come to be the sole affection of one who feels the approach of age?

Suddenly she heard in the distance the crack of a whip. She ran to the window and saw the phaëton as it turned round the lawn, drawn by two horses. Seated beside Annette, in the back seat of the carriage, Olivier waved his handkerchief on seeing the countess, and she responded by waving him a greeting from the window. Then she went downstairs with a heart throbbing fast but happy now, thrilled with joy at knowing him so near, of speaking to him and seeing him.

They met in the antechamber, before the drawing-room door.

He held out his arms to her with an irresistible impulse and in a voice warmed by real emotion exclaimed: "Ah, my poor countess, let me embrace you!"

She closed her eyes, leaned toward him, holding her cheek to him, and as he pressed his lips upon it, she murmured in his ear:

"I love you!"

Then Olivier, without dropping the hands he clasped in his own, looked at her, saying: "Let us see that sad face."

She felt ready to faint.

"Yes, a little pale," said he, "but that is nothing."

To thank him for saying that, she said brokenly:

"Ah, dear friend, dear friend!" finding nothing else to say.

But he turned, looking behind her in search of Annette, who had disappeared.

"Is it not strange," he said abruptly, "to see your daughter in mourning?"

"Why?" inquired the countess.

"What? You ask why?" he exclaimed, with extraordinary animation. "Why, it is your own portrait painted by me—it is my portrait. It is yourself, such as you were when I met you long ago when I entered the duchess' house! Ah, do you remember that door where you passed under my gaze, as a frigate passes under the cannon of a fort? Good heavens; when I saw the little one just now at the railway station, standing on the platform, all in black, with the sun shining on her hair massed around her face, the blood rushed to my head. I thought I should weep. I tell you, it is enough to drive one mad, when one has known you as I have, who has studied you as no one else has and reproduced you in painting, madame. Ah, I thought that you had sent her alone to meet me at the station in order to give me that surprise. My God! but I was surprised, indeed! I tell you, it is enough to drive one mad."

He called: "Annette! Nané!"

The young girl's voice replied from outside, where she was giving sugar to the horses:

"Yes, yes, I am here!"

"Come here!"

She came running.

"Here, stand close beside your mother."

She obeyed, and he compared the two, but repeated mechanically as though unconvinced: "Yes, it is astonishing, astonishing!" for they resembled each other less when side by side than they did before leaving Paris, the young girl having acquired a new expression of luminous youth in her black attire, while the mother had long since lost that radiance of hair and complexion that had dazzled and entranced the painter when they met for the first time.

Then the countess and Olivier entered the drawing-room. He seemed in high spirits.

"Ah, what a good plan it was to come here!" he said. "But it was your husband's idea that I should come, you know. He charged me to take you back with me. And I—do you know what I propose? You have no idea, have you? Well, I propose, on the contrary, to remain here! Paris is odious in this heat, while the country is delicious. Heavens! how good it is here!"

The dews of evening impregnated the

park with freshness, the soft breeze made the trees tremble, and the earth exhaled imperceptible vapors which threw a light, transparent veil over the horizon. The three cows, standing with drooping heads, cropped the grass with avidity, and four peacocks, with a loud rustling of wings, flew up into their accustomed perch in a cedar tree, under the windows of the château. Some dogs were barking far across the country, and in the quiet air of the close of day human voices were heard in detached sentences across the fields from one meadow to another, and those short, guttural cries used in driving animals.

The painter, with bare head, his eyes sparkling, breathed deeply, and, as he met the countess' look, he said:

"This is happiness!"

"It never lasts," she answered, approaching nearer.

"Let us take it when it comes," said he.

"You never used to like the country until now," the countess replied, smiling.

"I like it to-day because I find you here. I could no longer exist in a place where you are not. When one is young, he may be in love at a distance, through letters, thoughts or dreams, perhaps because he feels that life is all before him, perhaps, too, because passion is stronger than pure affection. At my age, on the contrary, love has become like the habit of an invalid; it is a binding up of the soul, which flies now with only one wing, and mounts less frequently into the ideal. The heart knows no more ecstasy, only selfish wants. And then I am well aware that I have no time to lose to enjoy what remains for me."

"Oh, old man!" she remonstrated, taking his hand.

"Yes, yes, I am old," he repeated. "Everything shows it, my hair, my changing character, the sadness which is stealing on me. Alas! that is something I never have known till now—sadness. If some one had told me when I was thirty that a time would come when I should be sad without cause, uneasy, discontented with everything, I should not have believed it. That proves that my heart also has grown old."

The countess replied with an air of profound certainty:

"Oh, as for me, my heart is still young. It never has changed. Yes, it has grown younger, perhaps. Once it was twenty; now it is only sixteen!"

They remained a long while thus, talking in the open window, blending with the spirit of the evening, very near each other, nearer than they ever had been, in this hour of tenderness, this twilight of love as of the day.

A servant entered, announcing dinner.

"Have you called my daughter?" the countess asked.

"Mademoiselle is in the dining-room."

All three sat down at the table. The shutters were closed, and two large candelabra, with six candles each, illumined Annette's face and seemed to powder her hair with gold dust. Bertin, smiling, looked at her continually.

"Heavens, how pretty she is in black!" he said.

And he turned toward the countess while admiring the daughter, as if to thank the mother for having given him this pleasure.

When they returned to the drawing-room the moon had risen above the trees in the park. Their sombre mass

appeared like a great island, and the country round about like a sea hidden under the light mist that float over the plains.

"Oh, mamma, let us take a walk," said Annette.

The countess consented.

"I will take Julio."

"Very well, if you wish."

They set out. The young girl walked in front, playing with the dog. When they crossed the lawn they heard the breathing of the cows, who had awakened, and scenting their enemy, raised their heads to look. Under the trees, farther away, the moon was pouring among the branches a shower of fine rays that fell to earth, flooding the leaves and casting on the path little patches of yellow light. Annette and Julio ran along, each seeming to have, on this serene night, the same joyful, unburdened heart, which expressed its exuberance in antics.

In the little open spaces, where the wave of moonlight descended as into a well, the young girl looked like a spirit, and the painter called her back, marveling at this vision in black with its clear, luminous face. Then, when she darted away again, he took the countess' hand and pressed it, often seeking her lips as they traversed the deeper shadows, as if the sight of Annette had revived the impatience of his heart.

At last they reached the edge of the plain, where they could just discern afar, here and there, the groups of trees belonging to the farms. Through the milky mist that bathed the fields the horizon appeared limitless, and the soft silence, the living silence of that vast, warm, moonlit space was full of inexpressible hope, of that indefinable expectancy which make summer nights so sweet. Far up in the heavens a few long slender clouds looked like silver shells. Standing still for a few seconds, one could hear in that nocturnal peace a confused, continuous murmur of life, a thousand slight sounds, the harmony of which seemed like silence.

A quail in a neighboring field uttered her double cry, and Julio, his ears erect, glided furtively toward the two flute-like notes of the bird, Annette following as softly as he, holding her breath and crouching down.

"Ah," said the countess, standing alone with the painter, "why do moments like this pass so quickly? We can hold nothing, keep nothing. We have not even time to taste what is good. It is over already."

Olivier kissed her hand and replied, smiling:

"Oh, I cannot philosophize this eveing! I belong to the present hour entirely."

"You do not love me as I love you," she murmured.

"Ah, do not——"

"No," she interrupted, "in me you love, as you said very truly before dinner, a woman who satisfies the needs of your heart, a woman who never has caused you a pain and who has put a little happiness into your life. I know that; I feel it. Yes, I have the consciousness, the ardent joy of having been good, useful and helpful to you. You have loved, you still love all that you find agreeable in me, my attentions to you, my admiration, my wish to please you, my passion, the complete gift I made to you of my whole being. But it is not me you really love, do you know? Oh, I feel that as one

feels a cold current of air. You love a thousand things about me—my beauty, which is fast leaving me, my devotion, the wit they say I possess, the opinion the world has of me and that which I have of you in my heart; but it is not me—me, nothing but myself—do you understand?"

He laughed in a soft and friendly way.

"No, I do not understand you very well. You attack me with reproaches that are quite unexpected."

"Oh, my God! I wish I could make you understand how I love you! I am always seeking some way of doing so, but can find none. When I think of you —and I am always thinking of you—I feel in the depths of my being an unspeakable longing to be yours, an irresistible need of giving myself to you even more completely. I should like to sacrifice myself in some absolute way, for there is nothing better, when one loves, than to give, to give always, all, all, life, thought, body, all that one has, to feel that one is giving and to be ready to risk anything to give still more. I love you so much that I love to suffer for you. I love even my anxieties, my torments, my jealousies, the pain I feel, when I realize that you are no longer tender toward me. I love in you a some one that only I have discovered, a you which is not the you of the world that is admired and known, a you which is mine, which cannot change nor grow old, which I cannot cease to love, for the eyes with which I look at it see but it alone. But one cannot say these things. There are no words to express them."

He repeated softly over and over:

"Dear, dear, dear Any!"

Julio came back, bounding toward them, without having found the quail, which had kept still at his approach. Annette followed him, breathless from running.

"I can't run any more," said she. "I will hook on to you, Monsieur Painter!"

She leaned on Olivier's free arm, and they returned, walking thus, he between them, under the shadow of the trees. They were silent. He walked on, possessed by them, permeated by a sort of feminine essence with which their contact filled him. He did not try to see them, since he had them near him; he even closed his eyes that he might feel their proximity the better. They guided him, led him, and he walked straight before him, fascinated by them, with the one on the left as well as the one on the right, without knowing, indeed, which was on the left or which on the right, which was mother, which was daughter. He abandoned himself willingly to the pleasure of that unpremeditated and exquisite sensuous delight. He even tried to blend them in his heart, not to distinguish them in his thought, and quieted desire with the charm of this confusion. Was it not only one woman beside him, composed of this mother and daughter, so much alike? And did not the daughter seem to have come to earth only for the purpose of reanimating his former love for the mother?

When he opened his eyes on entering the château it seemed to him that he had just passed through the most delicious moments of his life; that he had experienced the strangest, the most puzzling, yet complete emotion a man might feel, intoxicated with one feeling of love through the seductiveness ema-

nating from two women.

"Ah, what an exquisite evening!" said he, as soon as he found himself between them in the lamplight.

"I am not at all sleepy," said Annette. "I could pass the whole night walking when the weather is fine."

The countess looked at the clock.

"Oh, it is half-past eleven. You must go to bed, my child."

They separated and went to their own apartments. The young girl, who did not wish to go to bed, was the only one that went to sleep at once.

The next morning, at the usual hour, when the maid, after opening the curtains and the shutters, brought the tea and looked at her mistress, who was still drowsy, she said:

"Madame looks better to-day, already."

"Do you think so?"

"Oh, yes. Madame's face looks more rested."

Though she had not yet looked at herself, the countess knew that this was true. Her heart was light; she did not feel it throb, and she felt once more as if she lived. The blood flowing in her veins was no longer coursing so rapidly as on the day before, hot and feverish, sending nervousness and restlessness through all her body, but gave her a sense of well-being and happy confidence.

When the maid had gone she went to look at herself in the mirror. She was a little surprised, for she felt so much better that she expected to find herself rejuvenated by several years in a single night. Then she realized the childishness of such a hope, and, after another glance, resigned herself to the knowledge that her complexion was only clearer, her eyes less fatigued, her lips a little redder than on the day before. As her soul was content, she could not feel sad, and she smiled, thinking: "Yes, in a few days I shall be quite myself again. I have gone through too much to recover so quickly."

But she remained seated a very long time before her toilet-table, upon which, before a beautiful mirror of cut crystal, were placed all her little ivory-handled instruments of coquetry, bearing her arms, surmounted by a coronet.

She handled them a long time with practiced fingers, carrying them from her lips to her temples with touches softer than a kiss, correcting imperfections, underlining the eyes, beautifying the eyelashes. At last, when she went downstairs, she felt almost sure that the first glance cast upon her would not be too unfavorable.

"Where is Monsieur Bertin?" she inquired of a servant she met in the vestibule.

"Monsieur Bertin is in the orchard, playing tennis with mademoiselle," the man replied.

She heard them from a distance counting the score. One after the other the deep voice of the painter and the light one of the young girl called: "Fifteen, thirty, forty, vantage, deuce, vantage, game!"

The orchard, where a space had been levelled for a tennis-court, was a great square grass-plot, planted with apple-trees, enclosed by the park, the vegetable garden and the farms belonging to the castle. Along the slope that formed a boundary on three sides, like the defences of an intrenched camp, grew borders of various kinds of flowers, wild and cultivated, quantities

of roses, pinks, heliotrope, fuchsias, mignonette, and many more, which, as Bertin said, gave the air a taste of honey. Besides this, the bees, whose hives, thatched with straw, lined the wall of the vegetable garden, covered the flowery field in their buzzing flight.

In the exact centre of this orchard a few apple-trees had been cut down, in order to make a good tennis court, and a tarred net, stretched across this space, separated it into two camps.

Annette, on one side, with bare head, her black skirt caught up, showing her ankles and half way up to her knee when she ran to catch a ball, dashed to and fro, with sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks, tired, out of breath from the sure and practiced play of her adversary.

He, in white flannels and a white tennis cap, awaited the ball coolly, judged its fall with precision, received and returned it without haste, without running, with the elegant poise, the passionate attention and professional skill which he displayed in all athletic sports.

It was Annette that spied her mother first.

"Good-morning, mamma!" she cried, "wait till we have finished this game."

That second's distraction made her lose. The quick, low ball passed against her, almost rolling, touched the ground and went out of the game.

Bertin shouted "Won!" and the young girl, surprised, accused him of having profited by her inattention. Julio, trained to seek and find the lost balls, as if they were partridges fallen among the bushes, sprang behind her to get the ball rolling in the grass, seized it in his jaws and brought it back, wagging his tail.

The painter now greeted the countess, but, anxious to resume the game, animated by the contest, pleased to find himself so agile, he threw only a short, preoccupied glance at the face prepared so carefully for him, asking:

"Will you allow me, dear countess? I am afraid of taking cold and getting neuralgia."

"Oh, yes," the countess replied.

She sat down on a pile of hay, mowed that morning in order to give a clear field to the players, and, her heart suddenly touched with sadness, looked on.

Her daughter, irritated at losing continually, grew more animated, excited, utter cries of vexation or of triumph and flew impetuously from one end of the court to the other. Often, in her swift movements, little locks of hair were loosened, rolled down and fell upon her shoulders. She seized them with impatient movements, and, holding the racket between her knees, fastened them up in place, thrusting hairpins into the golden mass.

And Bertin, from his position, cried to the countess:

"Isn't she pretty like that, and fresh as the day?"

Yes, she was young, she could run, grow warm, become red, let her hair fly, brave anything, dare everything, for all that only made her more beautiful.

Then, when they resumed their game with zest, the countess, more and more melancholy, felt that Olivier preferred that game of ball, that childish sport, like the play of kittens, jumping after paper balls, to the sweetness of sitting beside her that warm morning and feeling her loving pressure against him.

When the first stroke of the breakfast bell sounded it seemed to her that some

one had freed her, that a weight had been lifted from her heart. But as she returned, leaning on his arm, he said to her:

"I have been amusing myself like a boy. It is a great thing to be or to feel oneself young. Ah, yes, there is nothing like it. When we do not care to run any longer, it is all over with us."

When they left the table the countess, who on the preceding day had for the first time omitted her daily visit to the cemetery, proposed that they should go there together. So all three set out for the village.

They were obliged to go through some woods, through which ran a stream called "La Rainette," no doubt because of the frogs that peopled it; then they had to cross the end of a plain before arriving at the church, situated in the midst of a group of houses that sheltered the grocer, the baker, the butcher, the wine merchant and several other modest tradesmen who supplied the needs of the country folks.

They walked along in thoughtful silence, the recollection of the dead weighing on their spirits. Arrived at the grave, the women knelt and prayed a long time. The countess, motionless, bent low, her handkerchief to her eyes, for she feared to weep lest the tears run down her cheeks. She prayed, but not as she had prayed until this day, in a sort of invocation to her mother, a despairing appeal penetrating beneath the marble of the tomb until she seemed to feel by the poignancy of her own anguish that the dead must hear her, listen to her, but a simple, hesitating and earnest utterance of the consecrated words of the *Pater Noster* and the *Ave Maria*. She would not have had on this day sufficient strength and steadiness of nerve for that cruel unanswered communion with what might remain around the tomb of that vanished being who was concealed within it. Other anxieties had penetrated her woman's heart, had agitated, wounded and distracted her; and her fervent prayer rose to Heaven, full of vague supplications. She implored God, the inexorable God who has cast all of us poor creatures on the earth, to take pity on her as well as on the one He had recalled to Himself.

She could not have told what she was asking of God, so vague and confused were her fears still; but she felt the need of Divine aid, of a superhuman support against approaching dangers and inevitable sorrows.

Annette, with closed eyes, having also murmured the formulas, sank into a reverie, for she did not wish to rise before her mother rose.

Olivier Bertin looked at them, thinking that he never had seen a more ravishing picture, and somewhat regretful that it was out of the question for him to make a sketch of the scene.

On their way back they talked of human life, softly stirring those bitter and poetic ideas of a tender but pessimistic philosophy, which is a frequent subject of conversation between men and women whom life has wounded a little and whose hearts blend as they sympathize with each other's grief.

Annette, who was not ripe for such thoughts, left them frequently to gather wild flowers beside the road.

But Olivier, desiring to keep her near him, nervous at seeing her continually darting away, never removed his eyes from her. He was irritated that she

should show more interest in the colors of the plants than in the words he spoke. He experienced an inexpressible dissatisfaction at not being able to charm her, to dominate her, as he had captivated her mother; and he felt a desire to hold out his hand and seize her, hold her, forbid her to go away. He felt that she was too alert, too young, too indifferent, too free—free as a bird, or a little dog that will not come back, will not obey, that has independence in its veins, that sweet instinct of liberty which neither voice nor whip has yet vanquished.

In order to attract her he talked of gayer things, and at times he questioned her, trying to awaken her feminine curiosity so that she would listen; but one would think that the capricious wind of heaven was blowing through Annette's head that day, as it blew across the undulating grain, carrying away and scattering her attention into space, for she hardly made even the commonplace replies expected of her and uttered with an absent air as they came up to her, returning at once to her flowers. Finally he became exasperated, filled with a childish impatience, and as she ran up to beg her mother to carry her first bouquet so that she could gather another, he caught her by the elbow and held her arm, so that she could not escape again. She struggled, laughing, pulling with all her strength to get away from him. Then, moved by masculine instinct, he tried gentler means, and, not being able to win her attention, he tried to purchase it by tempting her coquetry.

"Tell me," he said, "what flower you prefer, and I will have it made as a brooch for you."

She hesitated, surprised.

"What, a brooch?"

"In stones of the same color; in rubies if it is the poppy; in sapphires if it is the cornflower, with a little leaf in emeralds."

Annette's face lighted up with that affectionate joy with which promises and presents animate a woman's countenance.

"The cornflower," said he, "it is so pretty."

"The cornflower it shall be. We will go to order it as soon as we return to Paris."

She no longer tried to leave him, attracted by the thought of the jewel she already tried to see, to imagine.

"Does it take very long to make a thing like that?" she asked.

He laughed, feeling that he had caught her.

"I don't know; it depends upon the difficulties. We will make the jeweler attend to it at once."

A dismal thought suddenly crossed her mind.

"But I cannot wear it since I am in deep mourning!"

He had passed his arm under that of the young girl and pressed it against him.

"Well, you can keep the brooch until you leave off mourning," said he; "that will not prevent you from looking at it."

As on the preceding evening, he was walking between them, held captive between their shoulders, and in order to see their eyes, of a similar blue dotted with tiny black spots, raised to his, he spoke to them in turn, moving his head first toward the one, then toward the other. As the bright sunlight now shone on them, he did not so fully con-

found the countess with Annette, but he did more and more associate the daughter with the new-born remembrances of what the mother had been. He had a strong desire to embrace both, the one to find again upon cheek and neck a little of that pink and white freshness which he had formerly tasted, and which he saw now reproduced as by a miracle; the other because he loved her as he always had, and felt that from her came the powerful appeal of long habit. He even realized at that moment that his desire and affection for her, which for some time had been waning, had revived at the sight of her resuscitated youth.

Annette went away again to gather more flowers. This time Olivier did not call her back. It was as if the contact of her arm and the satisfaction of knowing that he had given her pleasure had quieted him; but he followed all her movements with the enjoyment one feels in seeing the persons or things that captivate and intoxicate our vision. When she returned with a large cluster of flowers he drew a deep breath, seeking unconsciously to inhale something of her, a little of her breath or the warmth of her skin in the air stirred by her running. He looked at her, enraptured, as one watches the dawn or listens to music, with thrills of delight when she bent, rose again or raised her arms to arrange her hair. And then, more and more, hour by hour, she evoked in him the memory of the past! Her laughter, her pretty ways, her motions brought back to his lips the savor of former kisses given and returned. She made of the far-off past, of which he had forgotten the precise sensation, something like a dream in the present; she confused epochs, dates, the ages of his heart, and rekindling the embers of cooled emotions, she blended, without his realizing it, yesterday with to-morrow, recollection with hope.

He asked himself as he searched his memory whether the countess in her brightest bloom had had that supple charm like a young fawn, that bold, capricious, irresistible grace of a bounding, running animal. No. She had had a riper bloom, but was less untamed. First, a child of the city, then a woman, never having imbibed the air of the fields and lived in the grass, she had grown pretty under the shadow of walls and not under the sunlight of heaven.

When they reëntered the château the countess began to write letters at her little low table in the bay window. Annette went up to her own room and the painter went out again to walk slowly, cigar in mouth, hands clasped behind him, through the winding paths of the park. But he did not go away so far that he lost sight of the white façade or the pointed roof of the castle. As soon as it disappeared behind groups of trees or clusters of shrubbery, a shadow seemed to fall over his heart, as when a cloud hides the sun; and when it reappeared through the apertures in the foliage he paused a few seconds to gaze at the two rows of tall windows. Then he resumed his walk. He felt disturbed, but content. Content with what? With everything.

The air seemed pure to him, life was good that day. He once more felt as foolish as a small boy, longing to run and catch the yellow butterflies fluttering over the lawn. He hummed little airs from the opera. Several times he repeated the celebrated phrase by Gou-

nod: *"Laisse-moi contempler ton visage,"* discovering in it a profoundly tender expression which he had never felt as he did now.

Suddenly he asked himself how it was that he had so soon become different from his usual self. Yesterday, in Paris, dissatisfied with everything, disgusted, irritated; to-day calm, satisfied with everything—one would say that some benevolent god had changed his soul. "That same kind god," he thought, "might well have changed my body at the same time and rejuvenated me a little." Suddenly he saw Julio hunting among the bushes. He called him, and when the dog ran up to put his finely formed head, with its curly ears, under his hand, he sat down on the grass to pet him more comfortably, spoke gentle words to him, laid him on his knees, and growing tender as he caressed the animal, he kissed it, after the fashion of women whose hearts are touched by trifles.

After dinner, instead of going out as on the evening before, they spent the time in the drawing-room.

Suddenly the countess said: "We must leave here soon."

"Oh, don't speak of that yet!" Olivier exclaimed. "You would not leave Roncières when I was not here; now that I have come, you think only of going away."

"But, my dear friend," said she, "we three cannot remain here indefinitely."

"It does not necessarily follow that we need stay indefinitely, but just a few days. How many times have I stayed at your house for whole weeks?"

"Yes, but under different circumstances, when the house was open to every one."

"Oh, mamma," said Annette coaxingly, "let us stay a few days more, just two or three. He is teaching me so well how to play tennis. It annoys me to lose, but afterward I am glad to have made such progress."

Only that morning the countess had been planning to make this mysterious visit of her friend's last until Sunday, and now she wished to go away, without knowing why. That day which she had hoped would be such a happy one had left in her soul an inexpressible but poignant sadness, a causeless apprehension, as tenacious and confused as a presentiment.

When she was once more alone in her room she even sought to define this new access of melancholy.

Had she experienced one of those imperceptible emotions whose touch has been so slight that the mind does not remember it, but whose vibrations still stir the most sensitive chords of the heart? Perhaps? Which? She recalled, certainly, some little annoyances, in the thousand degrees of sentiment through which she had passed, each minute having its own. But they were too petty to have thus disheartened her. "I am exacting," she thought. "I have no right to torment myself in this way."

She opened her window to breathe the night air and leaned on the window-sill, gazing at the moon.

A slight noise made her look down. Olivier was walking up and down before the castle. "Why did he say that he was going to his room?" she thought; "why did he not tell me he was going out again? Why did he not ask me to come with him? He knows very well that it would have made me so happy. What is he thinking of now?"

This idea that he had not wished her company on this walk, that he had preferred to go out alone this beautiful night, alone, with a cigar in his mouth, for she could see its fiery-red point—alone, when he might have given her the joy of taking her with him; this idea that he had not continual need of her, that he did not desire her always, created within her soul a new ferment of bitterness.

She was about to close the window, that she might not see him or be tempted to call to him, when he raised his eyes and saw her.

"Well, are you star-gazing, countess?"

"Yes," she answered. "You also, as it appears."

"Oh, I am simply smoking."

She could not resist the desire to ask, "Why did you not tell me you were going out?"

"I only wanted to smoke a cigar. I am coming in now."

"Then good-night, my friend."

"Good-night, countess."

She retired as far as her low chair, sat down in it and wept; and her maid, who was called to assist her to bed, seeing her red eyes, said with compassion:

"Ah, madame is going to make a sad face for herself again to-morrow."

The countess slept badly. She was feverish and had nightmare. As soon as she awoke she opened her window and her curtains to look at herself in the mirror. Her features were drawn, her eyelids swollen, her skin looked yellow, and she felt such violent grief because of this that she wished to say she was ill and to keep her bed, so that she need not appear until evening.

Then suddenly she felt an irresistible longing to go away, to depart immediately by the first train, to leave the country, where one could see too clearly by the broad light of the fields the ineffaceable marks of sorrow and of life itself. In Paris one lives in the half shadow of apartments, where heavy curtains, even at noontime, admit only a softened light. She would be herself again there, beautiful, with the pallor one should have in that discreetly softened light. Then Annette's face rose before her eyes—so fresh and pink, with slightly dishevelled hair, as when she was playing tennis. She understood then the unknown anxiety from which her soul had suffered. She was not jealous of her daughter's beauty! No, certainly not, but she felt, she acknowledged for the first time that she must never again show herself by Annette's side in the bright sunlight.

She rang, and before drinking her tea she gave orders for departure, wrote some telegrams, even ordering her dinner for that evening by telegram, settled her bills in the country, gave her final instructions, arranged everything in less than an hour, a prey to feverish and increasing impatience.

When she went downstairs Annette and Olivier, who had been told of her decision, questioned her with surprise. Then, seeing that she would not give any precise reason for this sudden departure, they grumbled a little and showed their annoyance until they separated at the station in Paris.

The countess, holding out her hand to the painter, said: "Will you dine with us to-morrow?"

"Certainly I will come," he replied, rather sulkily. "All the same, what you have done was not nice. We were so happy down there, all three of us."

CHAPTER III

A DANGEROUS WARNING

As soon as the countess was alone with her daughter in the carriage which was taking her home she suddenly felt tranquil and quieted, as if she had just passed through a serious crisis. She breathed easier, smiled at the houses, recognized with joy the look of the city, whose details all true Parisians seem to carry in their eyes and hearts. Each shop she passed suggested those beyond it, on a line along the Boulevard, and the tradesman's face so often seen behind his showcase. She felt saved. From what? Reassured. Why? Confident. Of what?

When the carriage stopped under the arch of the porte-cochère she alighted quickly and entered, as if flying, the shadow of the stairway; then passed to the shadow of her drawing-room, then to that of her bedroom. There she remained standing a few moments, glad to be at home, in security, in the dim and misty daylight of Paris, which hardly gives any light, compelling one to guess as much as to see where one may show or conceal as much as he pleases, and the unreasoning recollection of the dazzling glare that bathed the country, remained in her like an impression of past suffering.

When she went down to dinner, her husband, who had just arrived at home, embraced her affectionately and said, smiling: "Ah, ha! I knew very well that our friend Bertin would bring you back. It was very clever of me to send him after you."

Annette responded gravely, in the peculiar tone she affected when she said something in jest without smiling:

"Oh, he had a great deal of trouble. Mamma could not make up her mind to it."

The countess said nothing, but felt a little confused.

The doors being closed to visitors, no one called that evening. Madame de Guilleroy passed the whole of the following day in different shops, choosing or ordering what she needed. She had loved, from her youth, almost from her infancy, to stand and try on garments before the mirrors of the great shops. From the moment she returned home she rejoiced at the thought of all the details of that tedious repetition in the green-room of Parisian life. She adored the rustle of the dresses worn by the salesgirls who hastened forward to meet her, all smiles, with their offers, their queries; and madame the dressmaker, the milliner or corset-maker was to her a person of consequence, whom she treated as an artist when she expressed an opinion in order to obtain advice. She enjoyed even more to feel herself in the skillful hands of the young girl who undressed her and dressed her again, turning her round gently before her own gracious reflection. The little shiver that the touch of their fingers produced on her skin, her neck or in her hair was one of the best and sweetest little pleasures that belonged to her life of a woman of fashion.

This day, however, it was with a certain anxiety that she passed before

those candid mirrors, without her veil or hat. Her first visit to the milliner's reassured her. The three hats which she chose were wonderfully becoming, she could not doubt it; and when the milliner said, with an air of conviction, "Oh, Madame la Comtesse, blondes should never leave off mourning!" she went away much pleased and entered other shops with a heart full of confidence.

She found at home a note from the duchess, who had called to see her, saying that she would return in the evening. Then she wrote some letters; then she fell into dreamy reverie for some time, surprised that this simple change of place had banished into what now seemed a far-distant past the great misfortune that had overwhelmed her. She could not even believe that her return from Roncières dated from the day before only, so greatly had her condition of mind become modified since her return to Paris, as if that little change had healed her wounds.

Bertin, arriving at dinner-time, exclaimed on seeing her:

"You are dazzling this evening!"

And this exclamation sent a warm wave of happiness through her being.

As they were leaving the table the count, who had a passion for billiards, offered to play a game with Bertin, and the two ladies accompanied them to the billiard-room, where coffee was served.

The men were still playing when the duchess was announced, and they all returned to the drawing-room. Madame de Corbelle and her husband appeared at the same time, their voices full of tears. For some minutes it seemed, from their mournful tones, that every one was about to weep, but little by little, after a few tender words and inquiries, another current of thought set in. The voices took on a more cheerful tone, and every one began to talk naturally, as if the shadow of the misfortune that had saddened them had suddenly been dissipated.

Then Bertin rose, took Annette by the hand, led her under the portrait of her mother, in the ray of light from the reflector, and said:

"Isn't this amazing?"

The duchess was so greatly surprised that she seemed dazed. She repeated many times: "Heavens! is it possible? Heavens! is it possible? It is like some one raised from the dead. To think that I did not see that when I came in! Oh, my little Any, I find you again, I, who knew you so well at that time in your first mourning as a woman—no, in your second, for you had already lost your father. Oh, that Annette, in black like that—why, it is her mother come back to earth! What a miracle! Without that portrait we never should have perceived it. Your daughter resembles you now very much, but she resembles that portrait much more."

Musadieu now appeared, having heard of Madame de Guilleroy's return, as he wished to be one of the first to offer her the "homage of his sorrowful sympathy."

He interrupted his first speech on perceiving the young girl standing against the frame, illumined by the same brilliant light, appearing like the living sister of the painting.

"Ah, that is certainly one of the most astonishing things I ever have seen," he exclaimed.

The Corbelles, whose convictions always followed established opinions, marvelled in their turn with a little less

exuberant ardor.

The countess' heart seemed to contract, little by little, as if all these exclamations of astonishment had hurt it. Without speaking, she looked at her daughter standing beside her portrait, and a sudden nervous feeling came over her. She longed to cry out: "Oh, keep still! I know very well that she resembles me!"

Until the end of the evening she remained in a melancholy mood, having again lost the confidence she had felt the day before.

Bertin was chatting with her when the Marquis de Farandal was announced. As soon as the painter saw him enter and approach the hostess he rose and glided behind her armchair, murmuring: "Well, this is charming! Here comes that great blockhead now." Then, making a détour of the apartment, he reached the door and departed.

After receiving the greetings of the newcomer, the countess looked round to find Olivier, to resume their conversation in which she had been interested. Not seeing him, she asked:

"What, has the great man gone?"

"I believe so, my dear," her husband answered; "I just saw him taking English leave."

She was surprised, reflected a few moments and then began to talk to the marquis.

Her intimate friends, however, discreetly took their leave early, for she had only half opened her door, as it were, so soon after her affliction.

Later, as she lay in bed, all the grief that had overwhelmed her in the country came back. It took a more distinct form; she felt it more keenly. She realized that she was growing old!

That evening, for the first time, she had understood that, in her own drawing-room, where until now she alone had been admired, complimented, flattered, loved, another, her daughter, was taking her place. She had comprehended this suddenly, when feeling that every one's homage was paid to Annette. In that kingdom, the house of a pretty woman, where she will permit no one to overshadow her, avoiding with discreet and unceasing care all disadvantageous comparisons, where she allows the entrance of her equals only to attempt to make them her vassals, she saw plainly that her daughter was about to become the sovereign. How strange it was, that contraction of her heart when all eyes were turned upon Annette, whose hand Bertin was holding as they stood before the portrait! She herself felt as if she had suddenly disappeared, dispossessed, dethroned. Every one looked at Annette; no one turned to look at her! She was so accustomed to hear compliments and flattery, whenever her portrait was admired, she was so sure of eulogistic phrases, which she had little regarded but which pleased her nevertheless, that this desertion of herself, this unexpected defection, this admiration intended wholly for her daughter, had moved, astonished and hurt her more than if it had been a question of no matter what rivalry under any kind of conditions.

But, as she had one of those natures which, in all crises, react after the first blow, struggle and find causes for consolation, she reasoned that, once her dear little daughter was married, when they should no longer lived under the same roof, she herself would no longer be compelled to endure that incessant

comparison which was beginning to be too painful for her under the eyes of her friend Olivier.

However, the shock had been too much for her that evening. She was feverish and hardly slept at all. In the morning she awoke weary and overcome by extreme lassitude, and then there arose within her an irresistible longing to be comforted again, to be succored, to ask help from some one who could cure all her ills, all her mortal and physical ailments.

Indeed, she felt so ill at ease and weak that she thought of consulting her physician. Perhaps she was about to be seriously ill, for it was not natural that in a few hours she should pass through those successive phases of suffering and relief. So she sent him a telegram and awaited his coming.

He arrived about eleven o'clock. He was one of those dignified, fashionable physicians whose decorations and titles guarantee their ability, whose tact at least equals mere skill and who have, above all, when treating women, soothing words that are surer than medicines.

He entered, bowed, looked at his patient and said with a smile: "Come, this is not a very serious case. With eyes like yours one is never very ill."

She felt immediate gratitude to him for this beginning, and told him of her troubles, her weakness, her nervousness and melancholy. Then she mentioned, without laying too much stress on the matter, her distressingly ill appearance. After listening to her with an attentive ear, though asking no questions except as to her appetite, as if he knew well the secret nature of this feminine ailment, he sounded her, examined her, felt of her shoulders with the tips of his fingers, lifted her arms, having undoubtedly met her thought and understood with the shrewdness of a practitioner who lifts all veils that she was consulting him more for her beauty than for her health. Then he said:

"Yes, we are a little anæmic and have some nervous troubles. That is not surprising, since you have experienced such a great affliction. I will write you a little prescription that will set you right again. But, above all, you must eat strengthening food, take beef tea, no water, but drink beer. I will indicate an excellent brand. Do not tire yourself by late hours, but walk as much as you can. Sleep a good deal and grow a little plumper. This is all that I can advise you, my fair patient."

She had listened to him with deep interest, trying to guess at what his words implied. She caught at the last word.

"Yes, I am too thin," said she. "I was a little too stout at one time, and perhaps I weakened myself by dieting."

"Without any doubt. There is no harm in remaining thin when one has always been so; but when one grows thin on principle it is always at the expense of something else. Happily, that can be soon remedied. Good-by, madame."

She felt better already, more alert, and she wished to send for the prescribed beer for her luncheon at its headquarters, in order to obtain it quite fresh.

She was just leaving the table when Bertin was announced.

"It is I again," said he, "always I. I have come to ask you something. Have

you anything particular to do this afternoon?"

"No, nothing. Why?"

"And Annette?"

"Nothing also."

"Then can you come to the studio about four o'clock?"

"Yes, but for what purpose?"

"I am sketching the face of my *Rêverie,* of which I spoke to you when I asked you whether Annette might pose for me a few moments. It would render me a great service if I could have her for only an hour to-day. Are you willing?"

The countess hesitated, annoyed, without knowing the reason why. But she replied:

"Very well, my friend; we shall be with you at four o'clock."

"Thank you! You are goodness itself!"

He went away to prepare his canvas and study his subject, so that he need not tire his model too much.

Then the countess went out alone, on foot, to finish her shopping. She went down to the great central streets, then walked slowly up the Boulevard Malesherbes, for she felt as if her legs were giving way. As she passed Saint Augustin's she was seized with a desire to enter the church and rest. She pushed open the leather-covered door, sighed with satisfaction on breathing the cool air of the lofty nave, took a chair and sat down.

She was religious as very many Parisians are religious. She believed in God without a doubt, not being able to admit the existence of the universe without the existence of a creator. But associating, as does every one, the attributes of divinity with the nature of the created matter that she beheld with her own eyes, she almost personified the Eternal God with what she knew of His work, without having a very clear idea as to what this mysterious Maker might really be.

She believed in Him firmly, adored Him theoretically, feared Him very vaguely, for she did not profess to understand His intentions or His will, having a very limited confidence in the priests, whom she regarded merely as the sons of peasants, revolting from military service. Her father, a middle-class Parisian, never had imposed upon her any particular principles of devotion, and she had lived on, thinking little about religious matters until her marriage. Then, her new station in life entailing a stricter outward observance of her obligations toward the Church, she had conformed punctiliously to these light duties.

She was lady patroness to numerous and very well-known infant asylums, never failed to attend mass at one o'clock on Sundays, gave alms for herself directly and for society through an abbé, the vicar of her parish.

She had often prayed, from a sense of duty, as a soldier mounts guard at a general's door. Sometimes she had prayed because her heart was sad, especially when she suspected Olivier of infidelity to her. At such times, without confiding to Heaven the cause of her appeal, treating God with the same naïve hypocrisy that is shown to a husband, she asked Him to succor her. When her father died, long before, and again quite recently, at her mother's death, she had had violent crises of religious fervor and had passionately implored Him who watches over us and

consoles us.

And now behold! to-day, in that church where she had entered by chance, she suddenly felt a profound need to pray, not for some one nor for some thing, but for herself, for herself alone, as she had already prayed the other day at her mother's grave. She must have help from some source, and she called on God now as she had summoned the physician that very morning.

She remained a long time on her knees, in the deep silence of the church, broken only by the sound of footsteps. Then suddenly, as if a clock had struck in her heart, she awoke from her memories, drew out her watch, and was startled to see that it was already four o'clock. She hastened away to take her daughter to the studio, where Olivier must already be expecting them.

They found the artist in his studio, studying upon the canvas the pose of his *Rêverie*. He wished to reproduce exactly what he had seen in the Parc Monceau while walking with Annette: a young girl, dreaming, with an open book upon her knees. He had hesitated as to whether he should make her plain or pretty. If she were ugly she would have more character, would arouse more thought and emotion, would contain more philososphy. If pretty, she would be more seductive, would diffuse more charm and would please better.

The desire to make a study from his little friend decided him. The *Rêveuse* should be pretty and therefore might realize her poetic vision one day or other; whereas, if ugly, she would remain condemned to a dream without hope and without end.

As soon as the two ladies entered Olivier said, rubbing his hands:

"Well, Mademoiselle Nané, we are going to work together, it seems!"

The countess seemed anxious. She sat in an armchair and watched Olivier as he placed an iron garden-chair in the right light. He opened his bookcase to get a book, then asked, hesitatingly:

"What does your daughter read?"

"Dear me! anything you like! Give her a volume of Victor Hugo."

"La Légende des Siècles?"

"That will do."

"Little one, sit down here," he continued, "and take this volume of verse. Look for page—page 336, where you will find a poem entitled *'Les Pauvres Gens.'* Absorb it, as one drinks the best wines, slowly, word by word, and let it intoxicate you and move you. Then close the book, raise your eyes, think and dream. Now I will go and prepare my brushes."

He went into a corner to put the colors on his palette, but as he squeezed the leaden tubes, whence issued slender, twisting snakes of color, he turned from time to time to look at the young girl absorbed in her reading.

His heart seemed to contract, his fingers trembled, he no longer knew what he was doing and got his colors mixed as he blended the little piles of paint, so strongly was he affected at the reawakening, the sudden resurrection of this apparition in this very spot after twelve years.

Annette had now finished her reading and was looking straight before her. Approaching her, Olivier saw in her eyes two bright drops which overflowed and ran down her cheeks. He was thrilled with one of those shocks that make a man forget himself, and turning toward the countess he murmured:

"God! how beautiful she is!"

But he remained stupefied at the ghastly and convulsed face of Madame de Guilleroy. Her large eyes, full of a sort of terror, gazed at her daughter and at the painter. He approached her, suddenly touched with anxiety.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"I wish to speak to you."

Rising, she said hastily to Annette: "Wait a moment, my child; I have a word to say to Monsieur Bertin."

She passed swiftly into the little drawing-room near by, where he often made his visitors wait. He followed her, his head confused, understanding nothing. As soon as they were alone, she seized his hands and stammered:

"Olivier! Olivier, I beg you not to make her pose for you!"

"But why?" he murmured, disturbed.

"Why? why?" she said precipitately. "He asks it! You do not feel it, then, yourself? Why? Oh, I should have guessed it sooner myself, but I only discovered it this moment. I cannot tell you anything now. Go and find my daughter. Tell her that I am ill; fetch a cab, and come to see me in an hour. I will receive you alone."

"But, really, what is the matter with you?"

She seemed on the verge of hysterics.

"Leave me! I cannot speak here. Get my daughter and call a cab."

He had to obey and reëntered the studio. Annette, unsuspicious, had resumed her reading, her heart overflowing with sadness at the poetic and mournful story.

"Your mother is indisposed," said Olivier. "She became very ill when she went into the other room. Go to her. I will bring some ether."

He went out, ran to get a flask from his room and returned.

He found them weeping in each other's arms. Annette, moved by "Les Pauvres Gens," allowed her feelings full sway, and the countess was somewhat solaced by blending her grief with that sweet sorrow, in mingling her tears with those of her daughter.

He waited for some time, not daring to speak. He looked at them, his own heart oppressed with an incomprehensible melancholy.

"Well," said he at last, "are you better?"

"Yes, a little," the countess replied. "It was nothing. Have you ordered a carriage?"

"Yes, it will come directly."

"Thank you, my friend—it is nothing. I have had too much sorrow for a long time."

"The carriage is here," a servant announced.

And Bertin, full of secret anxiety, escorted his friend, pale and almost swooning, to the door, feeling her heart throb against his arm.

When he was alone he asked himself what was the matter with her and why had she made this scene. And he began to seek a reason, coming close to the truth without being willing to discover it. Finally he began to suspect. "Why," said he to himself, "is it possible she believes that I am making love to her daughter? No, that would be too absurd!" And combating with ingenious and loyal arguments that suppositious conviction, he felt indignant that she could for an instant have suspected that his sane, almost paternal affection, could have any taint of gallantry. He gradually became annoyed

with the countess, not allowing that she had the least right to suspect him of such villainy, of an infamy so unqualifiable; and he resolved that when he saw her later he would express his views pretty plainly.

He soon left his studio to go to her house, impatient for an explanation. On the way he prepared, with a growing irritation, the arguments and phrases that should justify him and avenge him for such a suspicion.

He found her in a reclining chair, her face changed by suffering.

"Well," said he dryly, "explain to me, my dear friend, the strange scene that just occurred."

"What, you do not yet understand it?" she said in a broken voice.

"No, I confess I do not."

"Come, Olivier, look well into your heart."

"My heart?"

"Yes, at the bottom of your heart."

"I don't understand. Explain yourself better."

"Look well into the depths of your heart and see whether you find nothing there that is dangerous for you and for me."

"I repeat that I do not comprehend you. I guess that there is something in your imagination, but in my own conscience I see nothing."

"I am not speaking of your conscience, but of your heart."

"I cannot guess enigmas. I entreat you to be more clear."

Then, slowly raising her hands, she took the hands of the painter and held them, and, as if each word broke her heart, she said:

"Take care, my friend, or you will fall in love with my daughter!"

He withdrew his hands abruptly, and with the impulse of innocence which combats a shameful accusation, with animated gesture and increasing excitement, he defended himself, accusing her in her turn of having suspected him unjustly.

She let him talk for some time, obstinately incredulous, sure of what she had said. Then she resumed:

"But I do not suspect you, my friend. You were ignorant of what was passing within you, as I was ignorant of it until this morning. You treat me as if I had accused you of making love to Annette. Oh, no, no! I know how loyal you are, worthy of all esteem and of every confidence. I only beg you, I entreat you to look into the depths of your heart and see whether the affection which, in spite of yourself, you are beginning to have for my daughter, has not a characteristic a little different from simple friendship."

Now he was offended, and, growing still more excited, he began once more to plead his loyalty, just as he had argued all alone in the street.

She waited until he had finished his defence; then, without anger, but without being shaken in her conviction, though frightfully pale, she murmured:

"Olivier, I know very well all that you have just said to me, and I think as you do. But I am sure that I do not deceive myself. Listen, reflect, understand. My daughter resembles me too much, she is too much what I was once when you began to love me, that you should not begin to love her, too."

"Then," he exclaimed, "you dare to throw in my face such a thing as that on this simple supposition and ridiculous reasoning: 'He loves me; my

daughter resembles me; therefore he will love her'!"

But, seeing the countess' face changing more and more, he continued in a softer tone:

"Now, my dear Any, it is precisely because I do find you once more in her that this young girl pleases me so much. It is you, you alone, that I love when I look at her."

"Yes, and it is just that from which I begin to suffer and which makes me so anxious. You are not yet aware of what you feel, but by and by you will no longer be able to deceive yourself regarding it."

"Any, I assure you that you are mad."

"Do you wish proofs?"

"Yes."

"You had never come to Roncières in three years, in spite of my entreaties. But you rushed down there when it was proposed that you should come to fetch us."

"Oh, indeed! You reproach me for not leaving you alone down there, knowing that you were ill, after your mother's death!"

"So be it! I do not insist. But this is it: the desire to see Annette again is so imperious with you that you could not pass this day without asking me to take her to your studio, under the pretext of posing her."

"And you do not suppose it was you I wished to see?"

"At this moment you are arguing against yourself, trying to convince yourself—but you do not deceive me. Listen again: Why did you leave abruptly, the night before last, when the Marquis de Farandal entered? Do you know why?"

He hesitated, very much surprised, disturbed, disarmed by this observation. Then he said slowly:

"Why—I hardly know—I was tired, and then, to be candid, that imbecile makes me nervous."

"Since when?"

"Always."

"Pardon me, I have heard you sing his praises. You liked him once. Be quite sincere, Olivier."

He reflected a few moments. Then choosing his words, he said:

"Yes, it is possible that the great love I have for you makes me love so much everything that belongs to you as to modify my opinion of that bore, whom I might meet occasionally with indifference, but whom I should not like to see in your house almost every day."

"My daughter's house will not be mine. But this is sufficient. I know the uprightness of your heart. I know that you will reflect deeply on what I have just said to you. When you have reflected you will understand that I have pointed out a great danger to you, while yet there is time to escape it. And you will beware. Now let us talk of something else, will you?"

He did not insist, but he was much disturbed. He no longer knew what to think, though indeed he had need for reflection. He went away after a quarter of an hour of unimportant conversation.

CHAPTER IV

SWEET POISON

With slow steps, Olivier returned to his own house, troubled as if he had just learned some shameful family secret. He tried to sound his heart, to see clearly within himself, to read those intimate pages of the inner book which seem fastened together, and which sometimes only a strange hand can turn over by separating them. Certainly he did not believe himself in love with Annette. The countess, whose watchful jealousy never slept, had foreseen this danger from afar, and had signaled it before it even existed. But might that peril exist to-morrow, the day after, in a month? It was the frank question that he tried to answer sincerely. It was true that the child stirred his instincts of tenderness, but these instincts in man are so numerous that the dangerous ones should not be confounded with the inoffensive. Thus, he adored animals, especially cats, and could not see their silky fur without being seized with an irresistible sensuous desire to caress their soft, undulating backs and kiss their electric fur.

The attraction that impelled him toward this girl slightly resembled those obscure yet innocent desires that go to make up part of all the ceaseless and unappeasable vibrations of human nerves. His artist's eye, as well as his eye as a man, was captivated by her freshness, by that bud of bright, beautiful life, by that essence of youth that glowed in her; and his heart, full of memories of his long friendship with the countess, finding in the extraordinary resemblance of Annette to her mother a reawakening of old feelings, of emotions sleeping since the beginning of his love, had been startled perhaps by the sensation of an awakening. An awakening? Yes! It was that! This idea gave him some light on the subject. He felt that he had awakened after years of sleep. If he had loved the young girl without being aware of it, he would have experienced beside her that rejuvenation of his whole being which creates a new man as soon as the flame of a fresh desire is kindled within him. No, the child had only breathed upon the former fire. It had always been the mother that he loved, but a little more now than latterly, no doubt, because of her daughter, this reincarnation of herself. And he formulated this decision with the reassuring sophism: "One loves but once! The heart may often be affected at meeting some other being, for every one exercises on others either attraction or repulsion. All these influences create friendship, caprices, desire for possession, quick and fleeting ardors, but not real love. That this love may exist it is necessary that two beings should be so truly born for each other, should be linked together in so many different ways, by so many similar tastes, by so many affinities of body, of mind, and of character, and so many ties of all kinds that the whole shall form a union of bonds. That which we love, in short, is not so much Madame X. or Monsieur Z.; it is a woman or a man, a creature

without a name, something sprung from Nature, that great female, with organs, a form, a heart, a mind, a combination of attributes which like a magnet attract our organs, our eyes, our lips, our hearts, our thoughts, all our appetites, sensual as well as intellectual. We love a type, that is, the reunion in one single person of all the human qualities that may separately attract us in others."

For him, the Comtesse de Guilleroy had been this type, and their long-standing friendship, of which he had not wearied, proved it to him beyond a doubt. Now, Annette so much resembled physically what her mother had been as to deceive the eye; so there was nothing astonishing in the fact that this man's heart had been surprised, if even it had not been wholly captured. He had adored one woman! Another woman was born of her, almost her counterpart. He could not prevent himself from bestowing on the latter a little tender remnant of the passionate attachment he had had for the former. There was no harm or danger in that. His eyes and his memory alone allowed themselves to be deluded by this appearance of resurrection; but his impulse had never strayed, for never had he felt the least stirring of desire for the young girl.

However, the countess had reproached him with being jealous of the marquis! Was it true? Again he examined his conscience severely, and decided that as a matter of fact he was indeed a little jealous. What was there astonishing in that, after all? Are we not constantly jealous of men who pay court to no matter what woman? Does not one experience in the street, at a restaurant, or a theatre, a little feeling of enmity toward the gentleman who is passing or who enters with a lovely girl on his arm? Every possessor of a woman is a rival, a triumphant male, a conqueror envied by all the other males. And then, without considering these physiological reasons, if it were natural that he should have for Annette a somewhat exaggerated sympathy, owing to his love for her mother, was it not natural also that he should feel in his heart a little masculine hatred of the future husband? He could conquer this unworthy feeling without much trouble.

But in the depths of his heart he still felt a sort of bitter discontent with himself and with the countess. Would not their everyday intercourse be rendered awkward by the fact that he was aware of her suspicion? Should he not be compelled at watch with tiresome and scrupulous attention all that he said and did, his very looks, his slightest attitude in presence of the young girl? for all that he might do or say would appear suspicious to the mother. He reached his home in a gloomy mood and began to smoke cigarettes, with the vehemence of an irritated man who uses ten matches to light his tobacco. He tried in vain to work. His hand, his eye, and his brain seemed to have lost the knack of painting, as if they had forgotten it, or never had known and practised the art. He had taken up a little canvas to finish a sketch—a street corner, at which a blind man stood singing—and he looked at it with unconquerable indifference, with such a lack of power to continue it that he sat down before it, palette in hand, and forgot it, continuing to gaze at it fixedly

though his thoughts were elsewhere.

Then, suddenly, impatience at the slowness of time, at the interminable minutes, began to wear on him. What should he do until he could go to the club for dinner, since he could not work at home? The very thought of the streets wearied him, filled him with disgust for the sidewalks, the pedestrians, the carriages and shops; and the idea of paying visits that day, to no matter whom, aroused in him an instantaneous hatred for every one he knew.

Then, what should he do? Should he pace to and fro in his studio, looking at the clock at every turn, watching the displacement of the long hand every few seconds? Ah, he knew well those walks from the door to the cabinet, covered with ornaments. In his hours of inspiration, impulse, ambition, of fruitful and facile execution, these pacings had been a delicious recreation—these goings and comings across the large room, brightened, animated, and warmed by work; but now, in his hours of inefficiency and disgust, the miserable hours, when nothing seemed worth the trouble of an effort or a movement, it was like the terrible tramping of a prisoner in his cell. If only he could have slept, even for an hour, on his divan! But no, he should not sleep; he should only agitate himself until he trembled with exasperation. Whence came this sudden attack of bad temper? He thought: "I am becoming excessively nervous to have worked myself into such a state for so insignificant a cause."

Then he thought he would take a book. The volume of *La Légende des Siècles* had remained on the iron chair where Annette had laid it. He opened it and read two pages of verse without understanding them. He understood them no more than if they had been written in a foreign tongue. He was determined, however, and began again, only to find that what he read had not really penetrated to his mind. "Well," said he to himself, "I seem to be growing imbecile!" But a sudden inspiration came to him as to how he should fill the two hours that must elapse before dinner-time. He had a hot bath prepared, and there he remained stretched out, relaxed and soothed by the warm water, until his valet, bringing his clothes, roused him from a kind of doze. Then he went to the club, where he found the usual companions. He was received with open arms and exclamations, for they had not seen him for several days.

"I have just returned from the country," he explained.

All those men, except Musadieu, the landscape painter, professed a profound contempt for the country. Rocdiane and Landa, to be sure, went there for shooting, but their sole enjoyment in the meadows and woods was to see pheasants, quail, or partridges falling like handfuls of feathers under their shot, or little rabbits, mortally wounded, turning somersaults like clowns, going heels over head four or five times, showing their white bellies and tails at every bound. Except for this sport in autumn and winter, they thought the country a bore. As Rocdiane would say: "I prefer little women to little peas!"

The dinner was lively and jovial as usual, animated by discussions in which nothing unusual was said. Bertin, to arouse himself, talked a great deal. They found him amusing, but as soon as he had had coffee, and a sixty-point

game of billiards with the banker Liverdy, he went out, strolling from the Madeleine to the Rue Taitbout; after passing three times before the Vaudeville, he asked himself whether he should go in; he almost called a cab to take him to the Hippodrome, changed his mind and turned toward the Nouveau Cirque; then made an abrupt half turn, without motive, design, or pretext, went up the Boulevard Malesherbes again, and walked more slowly as he approached the dwelling of the Comtesse de Guilleroy. "Perhaps she will think it strange to see me again this evening," he thought. But he reassured himself on reflecting that there was nothing astonishing in his coming a second time to inquire how she felt.

She was alone with Annette, in the little back drawing-room, and was still working on her coverlets for the poor.

She said simply, on seeing him enter: "Ah, is it you, my friend?"

"Yes, I felt anxious; I wished to see you. How are you?"

"Thank you, very well."

She paused a moment, then added, significantly:

"And you?"

He began to laugh unconcernedly, as he replied: "Oh, I am very well, very well. Your fears were entirely without foundation."

She raised her eyes, pausing in her work, and fixed her gaze upon him, a gaze full of doubt and entreaty.

"It is true," said he.

"So much the better," she replied, with a smile that was slightly forced.

He sat down, and for the first time in that house he was seized with irresistible uneasiness, a sort of paralysis of ideas, still greater than that which had seized him during the day as he sat before his canvas.

"You may go on, my child; it will not annoy him," said the countess to her daughter.

"What was she doing?"

"She was practising a *fantaisie*."

Annette rose to go to the piano. He followed her with his eyes, unconsciously, as he always did, because he thought her pretty. Then he felt the mother's eye upon him, and turned his head abruptly, as if he were looking for something in the dark corner of the drawing-room.

The countess took from her worktable a little gold case that he had given her, opened it, and offered him some cigarettes.

"Pray smoke, my friend," said she; "you know I like it when we are alone here."

He obeyed, and the music began. It was classical music, graceful and light, one of those compositions that seem to have inspired the artist on a soft moonlight evening in springtime.

"Who is the composer of that?" asked Bertin.

"Schumann," the countess replied. "It is little known and charming."

A desire to look at Annette grew stronger within him, but he did not dare. He would have to make only a slight movement, merely a turn of the neck, for he could see out of the corner of his eye the two candles that lighted the music; but he guessed so well, read so clearly, the watchful gaze of the countess that he remained motionless, his eyes looking straight before him, interested apparently in the gray thread of smoke from his cigarette.

"Was that all you had to say to me?"

Madame de Guilleroy murmured to him.

He smiled.

"Don't be vexed with me. You know that music hypnotizes me; it absorbs my thoughts. I will talk soon."

"I must tell you," said the countess, "that I had studied something for you before mamma's death. I never let you hear it, but I will play it for you immediately, as soon as the little one has finished; you shall see how quaint it is."

She had real talent, and a subtle comprehension of the emotion that flows through sounds. It was indeed one of her surest powers over the painter's sensibility.

As soon as Annette had finished Schumann's pastoral symphony, the countess rose, took her place, and awakened a strange melody with her fingers, a melody of which all the phrases seemed complaints, divers complaints, changing, numerous, interrupted by a single note, beginning again, sounding in the midst of the strains, cutting them short, scanning them, crashing into them, like a monotonous, incessant, persecuting cry, the unappeasable call of an obsession.

But Olivier was looking at Annette, who had sat down facing him, and he heard nothing, comprehended nothing.

He looked at her, without thinking, indulging himself with the sight of her, as a good and habitual possession of which he had just been deprived, drinking her beauty wholesomely, as we drink water when thirsty.

"Well," said the countess, "was not that beautiful?"

"Admirable! superb!" he said, aroused. "By whom?"

"You do not know it?"

"No."

"What, really, you do not know it?"

"No, indeed."

"By Schubert."

"That does not astonish me at all," he said, with an air of profound conviction. "It is superb! You would be delightful if you would play it over again."

She began once more, and he, turning his head, began again to contemplate Annette, but listened also to the music, that he might taste two pleasures at the same time.

When Madame de Guilleroy returned to her chair, in simple obedience to the natural duplicity of man he did not allow his gaze to rest longer on the fair profile of the young girl, who knitted opposite her mother, on the other side of the lamp.

But, though he did not see her, he tasted the sweetness of her presence, as one feels the proximity of a fire on the hearth; and the desire to cast upon her swift glances only to transfer them immediately to the countess, tormented him—the desire of the schoolboy who climbs up to the window from the street as soon as the master's back is turned.

He went away early, for his power of speech was as paralyzed as his mind, and his persistent silence might be wrongly interpreted.

As soon as he found himself in the street a desire to wander took possession of him, for whenever he heard music it remained in his brain a long time, threw him into reveries that seemed the dream continuation of the music itself, but even more distinct. The melody returned, intermittent and fugitive, bringing separate measures,

weakened, and far off like an echo; then, sinking into silence, appeared to leave it to the mind to give a meaning to the themes, and to seek a sort of tender and harmonious ideal. He turned to the left on reaching the outer Boulevard, perceiving the fairylike illumination of the Parc Monceau, and entered its central avenue, curving beneath the electric moons. A policeman was slowly strolling along; now and then a belated cab passed; a man, sitting on a bench in a bluish bath of electric light, was reading a newspaper, at the foot of the bronze mast that bore the dazzling globe. Other lights on the broad lawns, scattered among the trees, shed their cold and powerful rays into the foliage and on the grass, animating with a pale life this great city garden.

Bertin, his hands behind his back, paced the sidewalk, thinking of his walk with Annette in this same park when he had recognized in her the voice of her mother.

He sat down on a bench, and, breathing in the cool freshness of the dewy lawns, he felt himself filled with all the passionate expectancy that transforms the soul of youth into the incoherent canvas of an unfinished love story. Long ago he had known such evenings, those evenings of errant fancy, when he had allowed his caprice to roam through imaginary adventures, and he was astonished to feel a return of sensations that did not belong to his present age.

But, like the persistent note in the Schubert melody, the thought of Annette, the vision of her face bent beside the lamp, and the strange suspicion of the countess, recurred to him at every instant. He continued, in spite of himself, to occupy his heart with this question, to sound the impenetrable depths where human feelings germinate before they are born. This persistent research agitated him; this absorbing interest in the young girl seemed to open to his soul the way to tender reveries. He could not drive her from his mind; he bore within himself a sort of evocation of her image, as once he had borne the image of the countess after she had left him; he often had the strange sensation of her presence in the studio.

Suddenly, impatient at being dominated by a memory, he rose, muttering: "Any was stupid to say that to me. Now she will make me think of the little one!"

He went home, disturbed about himself. After he had gone to bed he felt that sleep would not come to him, for a fever coursed in his veins, and a desire for reverie fermented in his heart. Dreading a wakeful night, one of those nervous attacks of insomnia brought about by mental disturbance, he thought he would try to read. How many times had reading served him as a narcotic! He got up and went into his library to choose a good and soporific work; but his mind, aroused in spite of himself, eager for any emotion it could find, sought among the shelves for the name of some author that would respond to his state of exaltation and expectancy. Balzac, whom he loved, said nothing to him; he disdained Hugo, scorned Lamartine, who usually touched his emotions, and fell eagerly upon Musset, the poet of youth. He took a volume and carried it to bed, to read whatever he might chance to find.

When he had settled himself in bed, he began to drink, as with the thirst of a drunkard, those flowing verses of an inspired being who sang, like a bird, of the dawn of existence, and having breath only for the morning, was silent in the arid light of day; those verses of a poet who above all mankind was intoxicated with life, expressing his intoxication in fanfares of frank and triumphant love, the echo of all young hearts bewildered with desires.

Never had Bertin so perfectly comprehended the physical charm of those poems, which move the senses but hardly touch the intelligence. With his eyes on those vibrating stanzas, he felt that his soul was but twenty years old, radiant with hopes, and he read the volume almost through in a state of youthful intoxication. Three o'clock struck, and he was astonished to find that he had not yet grown sleepy. He rose to shut his window and to carry his book to a table in the middle of the room; but at the contact of the cold night air a pain, which several seasons at Aix had not succeeded in removing, ran through his loins, like a warning or a recall; and he threw aside the poet with an impatient movement, muttering: "Old fool!" Then he returned to bed and blew out his light.

He did not go to see the countess the next day, and he even made a heroic resolution not to return there for two days. But whatever he did, whether he tried to paint or to walk, whether he bore his melancholy mood with him from house to house, his mind was everywhere harassed by the incessant recollection of those two women.

Having forbidden himself to go to see them, he solaced himself by thinking of them, and he allowed both mind and heart to give themselves up to memories of both. It happened often that in that species of hallucination in which he lulled his isolation the two faces approached each other, different, such as he knew them; then, passing one before the other, mingled, blended together, forming only one face, a little confused, a face that was no longer the mother's, not altogether that of the daughter, but the face of a woman he still loved madly, long ago, still loved and would love forever.

Then he felt remorse at having abandoned himself to the influence of these emotions, which he knew were powerful and dangerous. To escape them, to drive them away, to deliver his soul from this sweet and captivating dream, he tried to think of everything, of every imaginable possible subject of reflection and meditation. Vain effort! In whatever direction his mind turned it always led him back to the same point, where he met a fair young face that seemed to be lying in wait for him. It was a vague and unavoidable obsession that hung over him and pulled him up short, no matter by what roundabout method he sought to avoid it.

The confusion of these two personalities, which had so troubled him on the evening of their walk at Roncières, rose again in his memory as soon, ceasing to reflect and reason, as he evoked them, and attempted to understand this strange emotion that stirred his being. He said to himself: "Let's see, have I for Annette a more tender feeling than I should have?" Then, probing his heart, he felt it burning with affection for a woman who was young, who had

Annette's features, but who was not she. And he reassured himself in a cowardly way by thinking: "No, I do not love the little one; I am the victim of a resemblance."

However, those two days at Roncières remained in his soul, as a spring of warmth, happiness, intoxication; and the least details of those days returned to him, one by one, with precision, sweeter even than at the time they occurred. Suddenly, while reviewing these memories, he saw once more the road they had followed on leaving the cemetery, the young girl plucking flowers, and he recollected that he had promised her a cornflower in sapphires as soon as they returned to Paris.

All his resolutions took flight, and without struggling longer he took his hat and went out, rejoiced at the thought of the pleasure he was about to give her.

The footman answered him, when he presented himself:

"Madame is out, but mademoiselle is at home."

Again he felt a thrill of joy.

"Tell her that I should like to speak to her."

Annette appeared almost immediately.

"Good-day, dear master," said she gravely.

He began to laugh, shook hands with her, and sitting near her, said:

"Guess why I have come."

She thought a few seconds.

"I don't know."

"To take you and your mother to the jeweler's to choose the sapphire cornflower I promised you at Roncières."

The young girl's face was illumined with delight.

"Oh, and mamma has gone out," said she. "But she will return soon. You will wait for her, won't you?"

"Yes, if she is not too long."

"Oh, I like that! Too long, with me! You treat me like a child."

"No, not as much as you think," he replied.

He felt in his heart a longing to please her, to be gallant and witty, as in the most successful days of his youth, one of those instinctive desires that excite all the faculties of charming, that make the peacock spread its tail and the poet write verses. Witty phrases rose to his lips, and he talked as he knew how to talk when he was at his best. The young girl, animated by his vivacity, answered him with all the mischief and sly humor that were in her.

Suddenly, while they were discussing a subject, he exclaimed: "But you have often told me that before and I have answered you——"

She interrupted him with a burst of laughter.

"Ah, you don't say 'tu' to me any more! You take me for mamma!"

He blushed and was silent. Then he stammered:

"Your mother has already maintained that opinion with me a hundred times."

His eloquence was extinguished. He no longer knew what to say, and he now felt afraid, incomprehensibly afraid, of this little girl.

"Here is mamma," said she.

She had heard the door open in the outer drawing-room, and Olivier, disturbed as if some one had caught him in a fault, explained how he had suddenly bethought him of his promise and

had come for them to take them to the jeweler's.

"I have a coupé," said he. "I will sit on the bracket seat."

They set out, and a little later they entered Montara's.

Having passed all his life in the intimacy, observation, study and amid the affection of women, having always occupied his mind with them, having been obliged to sound and discover their tastes, to know the details of dress and fashion as well as they knew them, being familiar with the minute details of their private life, he had arrived at a point that enabled him often to share certain of their sensations, and on entering one of the larger shops where the charming and delicate accessories of their beauty are to be found, he experienced a pleasurable emotion almost equal to that which stirred their enthusiasm. He interested himself as they did in those coquettish trifles with which they set forth their beauty; the materials pleased his eyes; the laces attracted his hands; the most insignificant furbelows held his attention. In jewelers' shops he felt for the showcases a sort of religious respect, and the counter, covered with dark cloth, upon which the supple fingers of the goldsmith turned over the gems to display their brilliant facets, filled him with a certain veneration.

When he had seated the countess and her daughter before this sombre piece of furniture, on which each, with a natural movement, placed one hand, he mentioned what he wanted, and they showed him models of little flowers.

Then they spread sapphires before him, from which it was necessary to choose four. This took a long time. The two women turned them over on the cloth with the tips of their fingers, then lifted them carefully, looked through them at the light, studying them with the rapt attention of connoisseurs. When they had laid aside those they had chosen, three emeralds had to be selected to make the leaves, then a tiny diamond that would tremble in the centre like a drop of dew.

Olivier, intoxicated with the joy of giving, said to the countess:

"Will you do me the favor to choose two rings?"

"I?"

"Yes. One for you, one for Annette. Let me make you these little presents in memory of the two days I passed at Roncières."

She refused. He insisted. A long discussion followed, a struggle of words and arguments, in which he triumphed, though not without difficulty.

Rings were brought, some, the rarest, by themselves in special cases; others arranged in similar groups in large square boxes, wherein all the fancifulness of their settings was displayed in alignment on the velvet. The painter was seated between the two women and began, with the same ardent curiosity, to take up the gold rings, one by one, from the narrow slits that held them. He placed them before him on the cloth-covered counter, separating them into two groups, those that had been rejected at first sight and those from which a choice would be made.

Time was passing, insensibly and sweetly, in this pretty work of selection, more captivating than all the pleasures of amusements, of society, entertaining and varied as a play, stirring also

an exquisite and almost sensuous pleasure in a woman's heart.

Then they compared, became animated, and, after some hesitation, the choice of the three judges settled upon a little golden serpent holding a beautiful ruby between his thin jaws and his twisted tail.

Olivier, radiant, now rose to his feet.

"I will leave you my carriage," said he; "I have something to look after, and I must go."

But Annette begged her mother to walk home, as the weather was so fine. The countess consented, and, having thanked Bertin, she went along the street with her daughter.

They walked for some time in silence, happy in the thought of the presents they had received. Then they began to talk of all the jewels they had seen and handled. Within their minds still lingered a sort of glittering and jingling, a sort of delight. They walked quickly through the crowd which fills the streets about five o'clock on a summer evening. Men turned to look at Annette and murmured words of admiration as they passed. It was the first time since her mourning, since mourning had added brilliancy to her daughter's beauty, that the countess had gone out with her in the streets of Paris; and the sensation of that street success, that awakened attention, those whispered compliments, that little wake of flattering emotion which the passing of a pretty woman leaves in a crowd of men, contracted her heart little by little with the same painful feeling she had had the other evening in her drawing-room, when her guests had compared the little one with her own portrait. In spite of herself, she watched for those glances that Annette attracted; she felt them coming from a distance, pass over her own face without stopping and suddenly settle upon the fair face beside her own. She guessed, she saw in the eyes the rapid and silent homage to this blooming youthfulness, to the powerful charm of that radiant freshness, and she thought: "I was as pretty as she, if not prettier." Suddenly the thought of Olivier flashed across her mind, and she was seized, as at Roncières, with a longing to flee.

She did not wish to feel herself any longer in this bright light, amid this stream of people, seen by all those men who were not looking at her. Those days seemed far away, though in reality quite recent, when she had challenged comparison with her daughter. Who to-day, among the passers-by, thought of comparing them? Only one person had thought of it, perhaps, a little while ago in the jeweler's shop. He? Oh, how she suffered! How could he help this comparison being always present to his mind! He certainly could not see them together without thinking of it!

"I feel ill," said she. "We will take a cab, my child."

Annette was uneasy.

"What is the matter, mamma?" she asked.

"It is nothing. You know that since your grandmother's death I often have these attacks of weakness."

CHAPTER V

A WANING MOON

Fixed ideas have the gnawing persistence of incurable maladies. Once they enter the soul they devour it, leaving it no longer free to think of anything, to take an interest in anything. Whatever she did, or wherever she was, alone or surrounded by friends, the comtesse could no longer rid herself of the thought that had come to her as she walked home beside her daughter. Could Olivier, seeing them together almost every day, help making a comparison between them?

Surely he must do it in spite of himself, incessantly, himself haunted by that unforgetable resemblance, accentuated still further by the similarity of tone and gesture they had lately tried to attain. Every time he entered she thought of that comparison; she read it in his eyes, guessed it and pondered over it in her heart and in her mind. Then she was tortured by a desire to hide herself, to disappear, never to show herself again beside her daughter.

She suffered, too, in all ways, no longer feeling at home in her own house. That pained feeling of dispossession which she had had one evening, when all eyes were fixed on Annette under her portrait, was become more intense, until she sometimes lost patience. She reproached herself unceasingly for feeling that yearning need for deliverance, that unutterable desire to send her daughter away from her, as though she were an embarrassing and tenacious guest; and she worked toward that end with unconscious cleverness, filled once more with the desire of struggling to retain, in spite of everything, the man she loved.

Unable to hasten Annette's marriage too urgently, because of their recent mourning, she feared, with a confused yet dominating fear, anything that might defeat that plan; and she sought, almost in spite of herself, to awaken in her daughter's heart some feeling of tenderness for the marquis.

All the resourceful diplomacy she had employed so long to hold Olivier now took with her a new form, shrewder, more secret, exerting itself to kindle affection between the young people and to keep the two men from meeting.

As the painter, who kept regular hours of work, never breakfasted away from home, and usually gave only his evenings to his friends, she often invited the marquis to breakfast. He would arrive with an atmosphere of enjoyment from his ride, a sort of breath of morning air. Annette was amused in listening to him, acquiring a taste for those topics of the day that he recounted to her, fresh and piquant as they were. An intimacy of youth sprang up between them, a pleasant companionship which a common and passionate love of horses naturally fostered. When he had gone the countess and the count would artfully praise him, saying everything necessary to let the young girl know that it depended only upon herself to marry him if he pleased her.

She understood very quickly, however, and reasoning frankly with her-

self, judged it a very simple thing to take for a husband this handsome fellow, who would give her, besides other enjoyments, that which she preferred above all others, the pleasure of galloping beside him every morning on a thoroughbred.

They found themselves betrothed one day, quite naturally, after a clasp of the hand and a smile, and the marriage was spoken of as something long decided. Then the marquis began to bring gifts, and the duchess treated Annette like her own daughter. Thus the whole affair had been fostered by common accord, warmed over the fire of a little intimacy, during the quiet hours of the day; and the marquis, having many other occupations, relatives, obligations and duties, rarely came in the evening.

That was Olivier's time. He dined regularly every week with his friends and also continued to appear without appointment to ask for a cup of tea between ten o'clock and midnight.

As soon as he entered the countess watched him, devoured by a desire to know what was passing in his heart. He gave no glance, made no gesture that she did not immediately interpret, and she was tortured by this thought: "It is impossible that he is not in love with her when he sees us one beside the other."

He, too, brought gifts. Not a week passed that he did not appear bearing two little packages in his hands, offering one to the mother, the other to the daughter; and the countess, opening the boxes, which often held valuable objects, felt again that contraction of the heart. She knew so well that desire to give, which as a woman she never had been able to satisfy—that desire to bring something that would give pleasure, to purchase for some one, to find in the shops some trifle that would please.

The painter had formerly been through this phase, and she had seen him come in many times with that same smile, that same gesture, a little packet in his hand. That habit had ceased after a while, and now it had begun again. For whom? She had no manner of doubt. It was not for her!

He appeared fatigued and thin. She concluded that he was suffering. She compared his entrance, his manner, his bearing with the attitude of the marquis, who was also beginning to be attracted by Annette's grace. It was not at all the same thing: Monsieur de Farandal was smitten, Olivier Bertin loved! She believed this at least during her hours of torture; then, in quieter moments, she still hoped that she had deceived herself.

Oh, often she could hardly restrain herself from questioning him when she was alone with him, praying, entreating him to speak, to confess all, to hide nothing! She preferred to know and to weep in the certainty rather than to suffer thus in doubt, not able to read that closed heart, in which she felt another love was growing.

That heart, which she prized more highly than her life, over which she had watched and which she had warmed and cheered with her love for twelve years, of which she had believed herself sure, which she had hoped was finally hers, conquered, submissive, passionately devoted for the rest of their lives—that heart was escaping her by an inconceivable, horrible and monstrous

fatality! Yes, it had suddenly closed, holding a secret. She could no longer penetrate it by a familiar word or hide therein her own affection as in a safe retreat open for herself alone. What is the use of loving, of giving oneself without reserve, if the one to whom one has offered one's whole being, one's whole existence, all one has in the world, suddenly forsakes you because another face has pleased him, transforming him in a few days almost into a stranger?

A stranger! He, Olivier? He spoke to her, as always, with the same words, the same voice, the same tone. And yet there was something between them, something inexplicable, intangible, insurmountable, almost nothing—that slight nothing that causes a sailboat to float away when the wind turns.

He was drifting, in fact, drifting away from her a little more each day, at every glance he cast upon Annette. He himself did not attempt to see clearly into the depths of his heart. He felt, indeed, that ferment of love, that irresistible attraction; but he did not wish to understand, he trusted to events, to the unforeseen chances of life.

He no longer cared about anything but those dinners and his evenings passed with those two women, separated from the gay world by their mourning. Meeting only indifferent faces at their house —usually those of the Corbelles and Musadieu—he fancied himself almost alone in the world with them; and as he now seldom saw the duchess and the marquis, for whom the morning and noontime were reserved, he wished to forget them, suspecting that the marriage had been indefinitely postponed.

Besides, Annette never spoke of Monsieur de Farandal before him. Was this because of a sort of instinctive modesty, or was it perhaps from one of those secret intuitions of the feminine heart which makes them suspect that of which they are ignorant?

Weeks followed weeks, without changing this manner of life, and autumn came, bringing the reopening of the Chamber, earlier than usual because of certain political dangers.

On the day of the reopening the Comte de Guilleroy was to take Madame de Mortemain, the marquis and Annette to the meeting of Parliament, after a breakfast at his own house. The countess alone, isolated in her sorrow, which was steadily increasing, had declared that she would remain at home.

They had left the table and were drinking coffee in the large drawing-room in a merry mood. The count, happy to resume parliamentary work, his only pleasure, talked very well on the existing situation and the difficulties of the Republic; the marquis, unmistakably in love, answered him enthusiastically, while gazing at Annette; and the duchess was almost equally pleased at the emotion of her nephew as at the distress of the government. The air of the drawing-room was warm with that first concentrated heat of newly lighted furnaces, the heat of draperies, carpets and walls, in which the perfume of asphyxiated flowers was evaporating. There was in this closely shut room, filled with the aroma of coffee, an air of comfort, intimate, familiar and satisfied, when the door opened to admit Olivier Bertin.

He paused at the threshold, so sur-

prised that he hesitated to enter. A confusion of anger and mingled emotion suffocated him, revealing to him the fact that he was madly in love! All that they had hidden from him and all that he had concealed from himself was now evident to him as he perceived the marquis installed in the house as a betrothed lover!

He perceived in a transport of anger all that he would rather not have known and all that the countess had not dared to tell him. He did not ask himself why all those marriage preparations had been concealed from him. He guessed why, and his eyes, with a hard expression, met those of the countess, who blushed. They understood each other.

When he was seated, every one was silent for a few seconds, his unexpected entrance having paralyzed their flow of spirits. Then the duchess began to speak to him, and he replied in a brief manner, his voice suddenly changed.

He looked round at these people who were now chatting again and said to himself: "They are making game of me. They shall pay for it." He was especially vexed with the countess and with Annette, whose innocent dissimulation he suddenly understood.

"Oh, oh! it is time to go," exclaimed the count, looking at the clock. Turning to the painter, he added: "We are going to the opening of Parliament, all except my wife, who will remain here, however. Will you accompany us? It would give me great pleasure."

"No, thank you," replied Olivier dryly. "Your Chamber does not tempt me."

Annette approached in a playful way, saying: "Oh, do come, dear master! I am sure that you would amuse us much more than the deputies."

"No, indeed. You will amuse yourself very well without me."

Seeing him discontented and chagrined, she insisted, to show that she felt kindly toward him.

"Yes, come, Sir Painter! I assure you that as for myself I cannot do without you."

His next words escaped him so quickly that he could neither check them as he spoke nor soften their tone:

"Bah! You do well enough without me, just as every one else does!"

A little surprised at his tone, she exclaimed: "Come, now! Here he is beginning again to leave off his 'tu' to me!"

His lips were curled in one of those sad smiles that reveal the suffering of a soul, and he said with a slight bow: "I shall have to get used to it some day or other."

"Why, pray?"

"Because you will marry, and your husband, whoever he may be, would be justified in considering that word rather out of place coming from me."

"It will be time enough then to think about that," the countess hastened to say. "But I trust that Annette will not marry a man so susceptible as to object to such familiarity from so old a friend."

"Come, come!" cried the count; "let us go. We shall be late."

Those who were to accompany him having risen, went out with him, after the usual handshakes and kisses which the duchess, the countess and her daughter exchanged at every meeting as at every parting.

They remained alone, She and He, standing behind the draperies of the closed door.

"Sit down, my friend," said she softly.

But he answered almost roughly: "No, thanks! I am going, too."

"Oh, why?" she murmured entreatingly.

"Because this is not my hour, it appears. I ask pardon for having come without warning."

"Olivier, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I only regret having disturbed a prearranged pleasure party."

She seized his hand.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "They were just about to set out, since they were going to be present at the opening of the session. I intended to stay at home. Contrary to what you said just now, you were really inspired in coming to-day when I am alone."

He sneered.

"Inspired? Yes, I was inspired!"

She seized his wrists, and looking deep into his eyes, she murmured very low:

"Confess to me that you love her!"

He withdrew his hands, unable to control his impatience any longer.

"Why, you are simply insane with that idea!"

She seized him again by the arm and, tightening her hold on his sleeve, she implored:

"Olivier! Confess, confess! I would rather know. I am certain of it, but I would rather know. I would rather —oh, you do not comprehend what my life has become!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"What would you have me do? Is it my fault if you lose your head?"

She held him, drawing him toward the other salon at the back, where they would not be heard. She drew him by his coat, clinging to him, out of breath. When she had led him as far as the little circular divan, she made him sit down and sat down beside him.

"Olivier, my friend, my only friend, I pray you to tell me that you love her. I know it, I feel it from all that you do. I cannot doubt it. It is killing me, but I wish to know it from your own lips."

As he still demurred, she fell on her knees at his feet. Her voice shook.

"Oh, my friend, my only friend! Is it true that you love her?"

"No, no, no!" he exclaimed, as he tried to make her rise. "I swear to you that I do not."

She reached up her hand to his mouth and pressed it there tight, stammering: "Oh, do not lie! I suffer too much!"

Then, letting her head fall on this man's knees, she sobbed.

He could see only the back of her neck, a mass of blond hair, mingled with many white threads, and he was filled with immense pity, immense grief.

Seizing that heavy hair in both hands, he raised her head violently, turning toward himself two bewildered eyes, from which tears were flowing. And then he pressed repeated kisses on those tearful eyes as he said:

"Any! Any! my dear, dear Any!"

She attempted to smile, and speaking in the hesitating voice of children when choking with tears, said:

"Oh, my friend, only tell me that you still love me a little."

He kissed her again.

"Yes, I love you, my dear Any."

She rose, sat down beside him again, seized his hands, looked at him and said tenderly:

"We have known each other so long. It should not end like this."

He pressed her close to him, asking:

"Why should it end?"

"Because I am old and because Annette is too much like what I was when you first knew me."

Now it was his turn to close her sad lips with his fingers, saying:

"Again! Please do not mention it again. I swear to you that you are mistaken."

"Oh, if you will only love me a little," she repeated.

"Yes, I love you," he said again.

They remained silent for some minutes, their hands clasped, deeply moved and very sad. At last she broke the silence, murmuring:

"Oh, the years that remain to me will not be cheerful!"

"I will try to make them sweet to you."

The shadow of those cloudy skies that precedes the twilight by two hours was darkening the drawing-room, burying them little by little in the gray dimness of an autumn evening.

The clock struck.

"We have been in here some time," said she. "You must go, for some one might come in, and we are not calm."

He rose, clasped her close, kissing her half-open lips as he used to do. Then they crossed the two drawing-rooms, arm in arm, like a married pair.

"Good-by, my friend."

"Good-by, my friend."

And the portière fell behind him.

He went downstairs, turned toward the Madeleine and began to walk without knowing what he was doing, dazed as if from a blow, his legs weak, his heart hot and palpitating as if something burning shook within his breast. For two or three hours, perhaps four, he walked straight before him, in a sort of moral stupor and physical prostration which left him only just strength enough to put one foot before the other. Then he went home to reflect.

He did love this little girl, then. He understood now his feelings when he was by her side, ever since that walk in the Parc Monceau, when he recognized in her voice the tone of a voice he scarcely remembered; the voice that long ago had awakened his heart; then all that slow, irresistible renewal of a love not yet extinct, not yet cold, which he persisted in not acknowledging to himself.

What should he do? What could he do? When she was married he would avoid seeing her often, that was all. Meantime he would continue to return to the house, so that no one should suspect anything, and he would hide his secret from every one.

He dined at home, which he very seldom did. Then he had a fire made in the large stove in his studio, for the night promised to be very cold. He even ordered the chandeliers to be lighted, as if he disliked the dark corners, and then he shut himself in. What strange emotion, profound, physical, frightfully sad, had seized him? He felt it in his throat, in his breast, in all his relaxed muscles as well as in his fainting soul. The walls of the apartment oppressed him; all his life was enclosed therein—his life as an artist, his life as a man. Every painted study hanging there recalled a success, each piece of furniture spoke of some memory. But successes and memories were things of the past! His life? How short,

how empty yet full it seemed to him. He had made pictures, and more pictures, and always pictures, and had loved one woman. He recalled his evenings, after their meetings, in this same studio. He had walked whole nights with his being on fire with fever. The joy of happy love, the joy of worldly success, the unique intoxication of glory had caused him to taste ever to be remembered hours of inward triumph.

He had loved a woman, and that woman had loved him. Through her he had received that baptism which reveals to man the mysterious world of emotion and of love. She had taken his heart almost by storm, and now he could no longer close it. Another love had entered, in spite of him, through this opening—another, or rather the same, relighted by a new face; the same, only stronger by virtue of the need of worshipping something that grows with our years. So he loved this little girl! He need no longer struggle, resist or deny; he loved her with the despairing knowledge that he would not even obtain a little pity from her, that she would always be ignorant of his terrible torment, and that another would marry her! At this thought, constantly recurring, impossible to drive away, he was seized with an animal-like desire to howl like chained dogs, for like them he felt powerless, enslaved, imprisoned. Becoming more and more nervous the longer he reflected, he strode up and down the large room, lighted up as if for a celebration. At last, unable to tolerate longer the pain of that reopened wound, he sought to try and calm it with the recollection of his early love, to drown it in the recollection of his first and great passion. From the wall closet, where he kept it, he took the copy of the countess' portrait that he had formerly made for himself. Then he put it on his easel, and sitting down in front of it, gazed at it. He tried to recall her, to see her alive again, just as she was when he first loved her. But it was always Annette that rose upon the canvas. The mother had disappeared, vanished, leaving in her place that other face which resembled hers so strangely. It was the little one, with her hair a little lighter, her smile a little more roguish, her air a little more mocking, and he felt that he belonged body and soul to that young being, as he never had belonged to the other, as a sinking vessel belongs to the waves!

Then he arose, and in order that he might not see this apparition any longer he turned the painting to the wall. Then, as he felt overwhelmed with sadness, he went to his bedroom, to the drawer of his desk, in which were sleeping all the letters of his loved one. There they lay, as if in a bed, one upon another, forming a thick layer of little thin papers. He thrust his hands among the mass; he looked at that narrow board coffin in which lay the piled-up envelopes on which his name, his name alone, was always written. He reflected that the love, the tender attachment of two beings, one for the other, were recounted therein, among that yellowing mass of papers with red seals, and he inhaled, in bending over them, the old melancholy odor of letters that have been packed away.

He wished to reread them, and feeling in the bottom of the drawer, he drew out a handful of the earlier ones. As soon as he opened them vivid mem-

ories emerged from them, which stirred his soul. He recognized many that he had carried about on his person for whole weeks and found again, throughout the delicate handwriting that said such sweet things to him, the forgotten emotions of early days. Suddenly he found under his fingers a fine embroidered handkerchief. What was that? He pondered a few minutes, then he remembered! One day, at his house, she had wept because she was a little jealous, and he had stolen and kept her handkerchief, moist with her tears!

Ah, what sad things! What sad things! The poor woman!

From the depths of that drawer, from the depths of his past, all these reminiscences rose like a vapor, but it was only the impalpable vapor of a dead past. Nevertheless he suffered and wept over the letters, as one weeps over the dead because they are no more.

But the remembrance of all his early love awakened in him a new and youthful ardor, a wave of irresistible tenderness which called up in his mind the radiant face of Annette. He had loved the mother through a passionate impulse of voluntary servitude; he was beginning to love this little girl like a slave, a trembling old slave on whom fetters are riveted that he never can break. He felt this in the depths of his being, and was terrified. He tried to understand how and why she had thus taken possession of him. He knew her so little! She was hardly a woman as yet; her heart and soul still slept with the sleep of youth.

He, on the other hand, was now almost at the end of his life. How, then, had this child been able to capture him with a few smiles and locks of hair? Ah, the smiles, the hair of that little blonde maiden made him long to fall on his knees and prostrate his forehead on the ground!

Does one know, does one ever know why a woman's face has suddenly the power of poison upon us? It seems as if one had been drinking her with one's eyes, that she had become one's mind and body. We are intoxicated with her, mad over her; we live in that absorbed image and would willingly die of it!

How one suffers sometimes from this terrible, incomprehensible power of a certain face on a man's heart!

Olivier Bertin began to pace his room again; night was advancing, his fire had gone out. Through the window-panes the cold air penetrated from outside. Then he went back to bed, where he continued to think and suffer until daylight.

He rose early, without knowing why, nor what he was going to do, his nerves unstrung, irresolute as a whirling weather-vane.

In seeking some distraction for his mind, some occupation for his body, he recollected that on that particular day of the week certain members of his club had the habit of meeting regularly at the Moorish Baths, where they breakfasted after the massage. So he dressed quickly, hoping that the hot room and the shower would calm him, and went out.

As soon as he reached the street he felt a chill, that first biting cold of the early frost, which destroys in a single night the last traces of summer.

All along the boulevards fell a thick shower of large yellow leaves which rustled down with a dry sound. The

road and the sidewalks were already covered with them, resembling for a few hours the paths in the woods at the beginning of winter. All that dead foliage crackled under the feet and massed itself, from time to time, in light waves under the gusts of wind.

This was one of those days of transition which mark the end of one season and the beginning of another, which fill us with joy or with a certain sadness —sadness at the death of the summer or joy at the rising of the sap.

In crossing the threshold of the Moorish Baths the thought of the warmth that would soon penetrate him after his walk in the cold air made Olivier's sad heart thrill with satisfaction.

He undressed quickly, wrapping round his body the light scarf the attendant handed to him, and disappeared behind the padded door open before him.

A warm, oppressive breath, which seemed to come from a distant furnace, made him gasp as he crossed a Moorish gallery lighted by two Oriental lanterns. Then a negro with woolly head, with shining body and muscular limbs, attired only in a girdle, ran before him to raise a curtain at the other end; and Bertin entered the large hot-air room, round, high-studded, silent, almost as mystic as a temple. Daylight fell from above through a cupola and through trefoils of colored glass into the immense circular room, with paved floor and walls covered with porcelain decorated with Moorish designs.

Men of all ages, almost naked, walked slowly about, grave and silent; others were seated on marble benches, with arms crossed; others still chatted in low tones.

The burning air made one gasp at the very entrance. There was something antique and mysterious in that stifling and decorated circular room, where human flesh was heated, where black and yellow attendants with copper-colored legs moved about.

The first face the painter saw was that of the Comte de Landa. He was promenading around like a Roman wrestler, proud of his enormous chest and of his great arms crossed over it. A frequenter of the hot baths, he felt like an admired actor on the stage and he criticised as an expert the muscles of all the strong men in Paris.

"Good-morning, Bertin," said he.

They shook hands. Then Landa continued: "Splendid weather for sweating!"

"Yes, magnificent."

"Have you seen Rocdiane? He is down there. I was at his house just as he was getting out of bed. Oh, look at that anatomy!"

A little gentleman was passing, bow-legged, with thin arms and flanks, the sight of whom caused the two old models of human vigor to smile disdainfully.

Rocdiane approached them, having perceived the painter. They sat down on a long marble table and began to chat quite as if they were in a drawing-room. The attendants moved about, offering drinks. One could hear the clapping of the masseurs' hands on bare flesh and the sudden flow of the shower-baths. A continuous pattering of water, coming from all corners of the great amphitheater, filled it also with a sound like rain.

At every instant some newcomer saluted the three friends or approached them to shake hands. Among them were the big Duc d'Harisson, the little Prince Epilati, Baron Flach and others.

Suddenly Rocdiane said: "How are you, Farandal?"

The marquis entered, his hands on his hips, with the easy air of well-made men, who never feel embarrassed at anything.

"He is a gladiator, that chap!" Landa murmured.

Rocdiane resumed, turning toward Bertin: "Is it true that he is to marry the daughter of your friend?"

"I think so," said the painter.

But such a question, before that man, in that place, caused Olivier's heart to throb with despair and rebellion. The horror of all the realities he had foreseen appeared to him for a second with such acuteness that he struggled an instant or so against an animal-like desire to fling himself on Farandal.

He arose.

"I am tired," said he. "I am going to the massage now."

An Arab was passing.

"Ahmed, are you at liberty?"

"Yes, Monsieur Bertin."

And he went away quickly, in order to avoid shaking hands with Farandal, who was approaching slowly as he walked round the Hammam.

He remained barely a quarter of an hour in the large, quiet resting-room, in his circle of alcoves with their beds enclosing a flower bed of African plants with a little fountain in the centre. He had a feeling of being pursued, menaced, as if the marquis were about to join him, and that he should be compelled, with extended hand, to treat him as a friend when he longed to kill him.

He soon found himself again on the Boulevard, covered with dead leaves. They had ceased to fall, the last having been detached by a long gust of wind.

Suddenly a sort of roaring noise glided over the roofs, the animal-like sound of a rising storm and at the same time a furious gust of wind that seemed to come from the Madeleine swept through the Boulevard.

All the fallen leaves, which appeared to have been waiting for it, rose at his approach. They ran before it, massing themselves, whirling and rising in spirals up to the tops of the buildings. The wind chased them like a flock, a mad flock that had fled before it, flying toward the gates of Paris and the free sky of the suburbs. And when the great cloud of leaves and dust had disappeared on the heights of the Quartier Malesherbes, the sidewalks and roads remained bare, strangely clean and swept.

Bertin was thinking: "What will become of me? What shall I do? Where shall I go?" And he returned home, unable to think of anything.

A news-stand attracted his eye. He bought seven or eight newspapers, hoping that he might find in them something to read for an hour or two.

"I will breakfast here," he said as he entered and went up to his studio.

But as he sat down he felt that he could not stay there, for throughout his body surged the excitement of an angry beast.

The newspapers, which he glanced through, could not distract his mind for a minute, and the news he read met his eye without reaching his brain. In the

midst of an article which he was not trying to comprehend the name of Guilleroy made him start. It was about the session of the Chamber, where the count had spoken a few words.

His attention, aroused by that item, was now attracted by the name of the celebrated tenor Montrosé, who was to give, about the end of December, a single performance at the Opéra. This would, the newspapers stated, be a magnificent musical solemnity, for the tenor Montrosé, who had been absent six years from Paris, had just won, throughout Europe and America, a success without precedent; moreover, he would be supported by the illustrious Swedish singer, Helsson, who had not been heard in Paris for five years.

Suddenly Olivier had an idea, which seemed to spring from the depths of his heart—he would give Annette the pleasure of seeing this performance. Then he remembered that the countess' mourning might be an obstacle to this scheme, and he sought some way to put it in execution in spite of the difficulty. Only one method presented itself. He must take a stage-box where one may be almost invisible, and if the countess should still not wish to go, he would have her father and the duchess accompany Annette. In that case he would have to offer his box to the duchess. But then he would be obliged to invite the marquis!

He hesitated and reflected a long time.

The marriage was certainly decided upon; no doubt the date was settled. He guessed the reason for his friend's haste in having it settled; he understood that in the shortest time possible she would give her daughter to Farandal. He could not help it. He could neither prevent, nor modify, nor delay this frightful thing. Since he must bear it, would it not be better for him to try to master his feelings, hide his suffering, appear pleased, and no longer allow himself to be carried away by his rage, as he had done?

Yes, he would invite the marquis, and so allay the countess' suspicions, and keep a friendly door open in the new establishment.

As soon as he had breakfasted he went down to the Opéra to engage one of the boxes hidden by the curtain. It was promised to him. Then he hastened to the Guilleroys'.

The countess appeared almost immediately, apparently still a little moved by their interview of the day before.

"How kind of you to come again today!" said she.

"I am bringing you something," he faltered.

"What is it?"

"A stage-box at the Opéra for the single performance of Helsson and Montrosé."

"Oh, my friend, what a pity! And my mourning?"

"Your mourning has lasted for almost four months."

"I assure you that I cannot."

"And Annette? Remember that she may never have such an opportunity again."

"With whom could she go?"

"With her father and the duchess, whom I am about to invite. I intend also to offer a seat to the marquis."

She gazed into his eyes and a wild desire to kiss him rose to her lips. Hardly believing her ears, she repeated: "To the marquis?"

"Why, yes."

She consented at once to this arrangement.

He continued in an indifferent tone: "Have you fixed the date of their marriage?"

"Oh, yes, almost. We have reasons for hastening it very much, more particularly as it was decided upon before my mother's death. You remember that?"

"Yes, perfectly. And when will it take place?"

"About the beginning of January. I ask you pardon for not having told you of it sooner."

Annette entered. He felt his heart leap within him, and all the tenderness that drew him toward her suddenly became bitter, arousing in his heart that strange, passionate animosity into which love changes when lashed by jealousy.

"I have brought you something," he said.

"So we have decided to say 'you'?" she replied.

He assumed a paternal tone.

"Listen, my child; I know all about the event that is soon to occur. I assure you that then it will be unavoidable. I may as well say 'you' now as later."

She shrugged her shoulders with an air of annoyance, while the countess remained silent, looking afar off, her thoughts preoccupied.

"Well, what have you brought me?" inquired Annette.

He told her about the performance and the invitations he intended to give. She was delighted, and, throwing her arms round his neck like a little girl, she kissed him on both cheeks.

He felt ready to sink, and understood, when he felt the light caresses of that little mouth with its sweet breath, that he never should be cured of his passion.

The countess, annoyed, said to her daughter: "You know that your father is waiting for you."

"Yes, mamma, I am going."

She ran away, still throwing kisses from the tips of her fingers.

As soon as she had gone Olivier asked: "Will they travel?"

"Yes, for three months."

"So much the better," he murmured in spite of himself.

"But do not neglect me meanwhile."

"No, my friend."

The impulse he had shown the evening before, when seeing her weep, and the intention which he had just expressed of inviting the marquis to the performance at the Opéra had given new hope to the countess.

But it was of short duration. A week had not passed ere she was again watching every stage of his suffering by the expression of his face. She could ignore nothing, herself enduring all the pain that she guessed at in him; and Annette's constant presence reminded her at every moment of the day of the hopelessness of her efforts.

Once, like every one else, she had some notion of the passing years and of the changes they bring. Like every one else, she had said to herself every winter, every spring, and every summer, "I have changed very much since last year." But, always beautiful, though with a changing beauty, she was never uneasy about it. Now, however, suddenly, instead of admitting peacefully the slow march of the seasons, she had just discovered and understood the formidable flight of the minutes.

She had had a sudden revelation of the gliding away of the hour, of that imperceptible flight, maddening when we think of it—of that infinite defile of little hurrying seconds, which nibble at the body and the life of men.

After passing miserable nights, she had long periods of drowsiness that made her more tranquil, as she lay in the warmth of her bed, when her maid drew back the curtains and lighted the morning fire. She lay there tired, drowsy, neither awake nor asleep, in the torpor of thought which revived within her that instinctive and providential hope which gives light and life to the hearts of men up to their last day.

Every morning now, as soon as she rose from her bed, she felt moved by a strong desire to pray to God, to obtain from Him a little relief and consolation.

She would kneel before a large oaken crucifix, a gift from Olivier, a rare treasure he had discovered; and, with lips closed, but imploring with that voice of the soul with which we speak to ourselves, she made her sorrowful supplication to the Divine martyr. Distracted by the need of being heard and succored, naïve in her distress, as are all the faithful ones when they pray, she could not doubt that He heard her, that He was attentive to her request, and was perhaps touched at her grief. She did not ask Him to do for her that which He never had done for any one—to leave her until death all her charm, her freshness and grace; she begged only a little repose, a little respite. She must grow old, of course, just as she must die. But why so soon? Some women remain beautiful so long! Could He not grant that she should be one of these? How good He would be, He who had also suffered so much, if only He would let her keep for two or three years still the little charm she needed in order to be pleasing!

She did not say these things to Him, of course, but she sighed them forth, in the confused plaint of her being.

Then, having risen, she would sit before her toilet-table, and with a tension of thought as intense as while praying, she would handle the powders, the cold cream, the pencils, the puffs and brushes, which gave her once more the beauty of a plaster cast, fragile, lasting only for a day.

CHAPTER VI

THE ASHES OF LOVE

On the Boulevard two names were heard from all lips: "Emma Helsson" and "Montrosé." The nearer one approached the opera house the oftener one heard those names repeated. Immense posters, too, affixed to the Morris columns, announced them to the passers-by, and in the evening air could be felt the excitement of an approaching event.

That ponderous monument called the National Academy of Music, squatted under the black sky, exhibited to the crowd before its doors the pompous, whitish façade and the marble colonnade of its balcony, illuminated like a stage setting by invisible electric lights.

In the square the mounted Republican guards directed the movement of the crowds, and the innumerable carriages coming from all parts of Paris allowed one to catch glimpses of creamy light stuff and fair faces behind their lowered windows.

The coupés and landaus formed in line under the reserved arcades, and stopped for a moment, and from them alighted fashionable and other women, in their opera-cloaks, trimmed with fur, feathers, and rare laces—beautiful bodies, divinely dressed!

The whole length of the celebrated stairway was a sort of fairy ascent, an uninterrupted mounting of ladies dressed like queens, whose throats and ears flashed sparkling rays from their diamonds, and whose long trains swept the stairs.

The theater was filling early, for no one wished to lose a note of the two illustrious artists; and throughout the vast amphitheater, under the dazzling electric light from the great chandelier, a throng of people were seating themselves amid an uproar of voices.

From the stage-box, already occupied by the duchess, Annette, the count, the marquis, Bertin and Musadieu, one could see nothing but the wings, where men were talking, running about, and shouting, machinists in blouses, gentlemen in evening dress, actors in costume. But behind the great curtain one heard the deep sound of the crowd, one felt the presence of a mass of moving, overexcited beings, whose agitation seemed to penetrate the curtain, and to extend even to the decorations.

They were about to present *Faust*.

Musadieu was relating anecdotes about the first representations of this work at the Théâtre Lyrique; of its half success in the beginning, followed by brilliant triumph; of the original cast, and their manner of singing each aria. Annette, half turned toward him, listened with that eager, youthful curiosity with which she regarded the whole world; and at times she cast a tender glance at her fiancé, who in a few days would be her husband. She loved him now as innocent hearts love; that is to say, she loved in him all the hopes she had for the future. The intoxication of the first enjoyments of life, and the ardent longing to be happy, made her tremble with joy and expectation.

And Olivier, who saw all and who who knew all, who had sounded all the depths of secret, helpless and jealous love, down to the furnace of human suffering, where the heart seems to crackle like flesh over live coals, stood in the back of the box looking at them with eyes that betrayed his torture.

The three blows were struck, and suddenly the sharp little tap of the baton on the leader's desk put a sudden stop to all movement, all coughing and whispering. Then, after a brief and profound silence, the first measure of the overture arose, filling the house with the invisible and irresistible mystery of music that penetrates our bodies, thrills our nerves and souls with a poetic and sensuous fever, blending with the limpid air we breathe a wave of sound to which we listen.

Olivier took a seat at the back of the box, painfully affected, as if the wounds of his heart had been touched by those accents. But when the curtain rose he stood up again and saw Doctor Faust lost in meditation seated in his alchemist's laboratory.

He had already heard the opera twenty times, and almost knew it by heart, and his attention soon wandered from the stage to the audience. He could see only a small part of it behind the frame of the stage which concealed their box, but the angle that was visible, extending from the orchestra to the top gallery, showed him a portion of the audience, among whom he recognized many faces. In the orchestra rows the men in white cravats, sitting side by side, seemed a museum of familiar countenances, society men, artists, journalists, the whole category of those who never fail to go where every one else goes. In the balcony and in the boxes he noted and named to himself the women he recognized. The Comtesse de Lochrist, in a proscenium box, was absolutely ravishing, while a little farther on a bride, the Marquise d'Ebelin, was already looking through her lorgnette. "That is a pretty beginning," said Bertin to himself.

The audience listened with deep attention and evident sympathy to the tenor Montrosé, who was lamenting over his life.

Olivier thought: "What a farce! There is Faust, the mysterious and sublime Faust who sings the horrible disgust and nothingness of everything; and this crowd are asking themselves anxiously whether Montrosé's voice has not changed!" Then he listened like the others, and behind the trivial words of the libretto, through that music which awakens profound feeling in the soul, he had a sort of revelation as to how Goethe had been able to conceive the heart of Faust.

He had read the poem some time before, and thought it very beautiful without being moved by it, but now he suddenly realized its unfathomable depth, for it seemed to him that on that evening he himself had become a Faust.

Leaning lightly upon the railing of the box, Annette was listening with all her ears; and murmurs of satisfaction were beginning to be heard from the audience, for Montrosé's voice was better and richer than ever!

Bertin had closed his eyes. For a whole month, all that he had seen, all that he had felt, everything that he had encountered in life he had immediately transformed into a sort of accessory to his passion. He cast the world and himself as fuel to this fixed idea. All that he saw that was beautiful or rare, all the delightful things he thought of he mentally offered to his little friend; and he had no longer an idea that he did not in some way connect with his love.

Now he listened from the depths of his soul to the echo of Faust's lamentations, and the desire to die surged up within him, the desire to have done with all his grief, with all the misery of his hopeless love. He looked at Annette's delicate profile, and saw the Marquis de Farandal seated behind her also looking at it. He felt old, lost, despairing. Ah, to no longer have any expectation, any hope, not even the right to desire her, to feel himself turned away in the evening of life, like a superannuated functionary whose career is ended—

what intolerable torture!

Applause burst forth; Montrosé had triumphed already. And Labarrière as Mephistopheles rose up from the ground.

Olivier, who never had heard him in this *rôle,* listened with renewed attention. The remembrance of Aubin, so dramatic with his bass voice, then of Faure, so seductive with his baritone, distracted his attention for a few moments.

But suddenly a phrase sung by Montrosé with irresistible power stirred him to the heart. Faust was saying to Satan:

"Je veux un trésor qui les contient tous—
Je veux la jeunesse."

And the tenor appeared in silken doublet, a sword by his side, a plumed cap on his head, elegant, young and handsome, with the affectations of a handsome singer.

A murmur arose. He was very attractive and the women were pleased with him. But Olivier felt some disappointment, for the vivid apparition of Goethe's dramatic poem disappeared in this metamorphosis. Thenceforth he saw before him only a fairy spectacle, filled with pretty little songs, and actors of talent whose voices alone were all he listened to. That man in a doublet, that pretty youth with his roulades, who showed off his thighs and his voice, displeased him. This was not the real, irresistible and sinister Chevalier Faust, who was about to seduce the fair Marguerite.

He sat down again, and the phrase he had just heard returned to his mind:

"I would have a treasure that embraces all—Youth!"

He murmured it beneath his breath, sang it sadly in the depths of his soul, and, with eyes still fixed on Annette's blond head, which rose in the square opening of the box, he felt all the bitterness of that desire that never could be realized.

But Montrosé had just finished the first act with such perfection that enthusiasm broke forth. For several minutes the noise of clapping, stamping and bravos swept like a storm through the theatre. In all the boxes the women clapped their gloved hands, while the men standing behind them shouted as they applauded.

The curtain fell, but it was raised twice before the applause subsided. Then, when it fell for the third time, separating the stage and the interior boxes from the audience, the duchess and Annette continued their applause a few moments, and were specially thanked by a discreet bow from the tenor.

"Oh, he saw us!" said Annette.

"What an admirable artist!" said the duchess.

And Bertin, who had been leaning over, looked with a mingled feeling of irritation and disdain at the admired actor as he disappeared between two wings, waddling a little, his legs stiff, one hand on his hip, in the affected pose of a theatrical hero.

They began to talk of him. His social successes had made him as famous as his talent. Musadieu related, in veiled language because of Annette's presence, details of the life of this handsome singer, and the duchess, quite carried away, understood and approved all the

affairs in which he had been involved and concluded, laughing: "And how could any one resist that voice!"

Olivier felt angry and bitter. He did not understand how any one could really care for a mere actor, for that perpetual personification of human types which never resembled himself; that nocturnal and painted manikin who plays all his characters at so much a night.

"You are jealous of them!" said the duchess. "You men of the world and artists all have a grudge against actors because they are more successful than you." Turning to Annette, she added: "Come, little one, you who are entering life and look at it with sane eyes, what do you think of this tenor?"

"I think he is very good indeed," Annette replied, with an air of conviction.

The three strokes sounded for the second act, and the curtain rose on the Kermesse.

Helsson's rendering of the part was superb. She seemed to have more voice than formerly, and to have acquired more certainty of method. She had, indeed, become the great, excellent, exquisite singer, whose worldly fame equalled that of Bismarck or De Lesseps.

When Faust rushed toward her, when he sang in his bewitching voice that phrase so full of charm:

"Ne permettrez-vous pas, ma belle demoiselle,
Qu'on vous offre le bras, pour faire le chemin?"

And when the pretty blonde Marguerite replied so touchingly:

"Non, monsieur, je ne suis demoiselle ni belle,
Et je n'ai pas besoin qu'on me donne la main,"

the whole house was moved with a thrill of pleasure.

When the curtain fell the applause was tremendous, and Annette applauded so long that Bertin wished to seize her hands to make her stop. His heart was stung by a new torment. He did not speak between the acts, for his fixed thought, now become absolute hatred, was following into his dressing room the odious singer who was thus affecting this child.

Then the curtain rose on the garden scene. Immediately a sort of fever of love seemed to spread through the house, for never had that music, which seems like the breath of kisses, been rendered by two such interpreters. It was no longer two illustrious actors, Montrosé and Helsson; they became two beings from the ideal world, hardly two beings, indeed, but two voices: the eternal voice of the man that loves, the eternal voice of the woman that yields; and together they sighed forth all the poetry of human tenderness.

When Faust sang:

"Laisse-moi, laisse-moi contempler ton visage,"

in the notes that soared from his mouth there was such an accent of adoration, of transport and supplication that for a moment a desire to love filled every heart.

Olivier remembered that he had murmured that phrase himself in the park at Roncières, under the castle windows.

Until then he had thought it rather ordinary; but now it rose to his lips like a last cry of passion, a last prayer, the last hope and the last favor he might expect in this life.

Then he listened no more, heard nothing more. A sharp pang of jealousy tore his heart, for he had just seen Annette carry her handkerchief to her eyes.

She wept! Then her heart was awakening, becoming animated and moved, her little woman's heart which as yet knew nothing! There, quite close to him, without giving him a thought, she had a revelation of the way in which love may overwhelm a human being; and this revelation, this initiation had come to her from that miserable strolling singer!

Ah, he felt very little anger now toward the Marquis de Farandal, that stupid creature who saw nothing, who did not know, did not understand! But now he execrated that man in tights, who was awakening the soul of that young girl!

He longed to throw himself upon her, as one throws himself upon a person in danger of being run over by a fractious horse, to seize her by the arm, and drag her away, and say to her: "Let us go! let us go! I entreat you!"

How she listened, how she vibrated! And how he suffered. He had suffered thus before, but less cruelly. He remembered it, for the stings of jealousy smart afresh like reopened wounds. He had first felt it at Roncières, in returning from the cemetery, when he felt for the first time that she was escaping from him, that he could not control her, that young girl as independent as a young animal. But down there, when he had irritated him by leaving him to pluck flowers, he had experienced chiefly a brutal desire to check her playful flights, to compel her person to remain beside him; to-day it was her fleeting, intangible soul that was escaping. Ah, that gnawing irritation which he had just recognized, how often he had experienced it in the indescribable little wounds which seem to be always bruising a loving heart. He recalled all the painful impressions of petty jealousy that he had endured, in little stings, day after day. Every time that she had remarked, admired, liked, desired something, he had been jealous of it; jealous in an imperceptible but continuous fashion, jealous of all that absorbed the time, the looks, the attention, the gaiety, the astonishment or affection of Annette, for all that took a little of her away from him. He had been jealous of all that she did without him, of all that he did not know, of her going about, her reading, of everything that seemed to please her, jealous even of a heroic officer wounded in Africa, of whom Paris talked for a week, of the author of a much praised romance, of a young unknown poet she never had seen, but whose verses Musadieu had recited; in short, of all men that any one praised before her, even carelessly, for when one loves a woman one cannot tolerate without anguish that she should even think of another with an appearance of interest. In one's heart is the imperious need of being the only one in the world in her eyes. One wishes her to see, to know, to appreciate no one else. So soon as she appears to be turning to look at or to recognize some one else, one places himself before her, and unless one can turn aside or absorb her whole interest

he suffers to the bottom of his heart.

Olivier suffered thus in the presence of this singer, who seemed to scatter and to gather love in that opera house, and he felt vexed with every one because of the tenor's triumph, with the women whom he saw applauding him from their boxes, with the men, those idiots who were giving a sort of apotheosis to that coxcomb!

An artist! they called him an artist, a great artist! And he had successes, this paid actor, interpreter of another's thought, such as no creator had ever known! Ah, that was like the justice and the intelligence of the fashionable world, those ignorant and pretentious amateurs for whom the masters of human art work until death. He looked at them, applauding, shouting, going into ecstasies; and the old hostility that had always seethed at the bottom of his proud heart of a *parvenu* became a furious anger against those imbeciles, all powerful only by right of birth and wealth.

Until the end of the performance he remained silent, a prey to thought; then when the storm of enthusiasm had at last subsided he offered his arm to the duchess, while the marquis took Annette's. They descended the grand stairway again, in the midst of a stream of men and women, in a sort of slow and magnificent cascade of bare shoulders, sumptuous gowns and black coats. Then the duchess, the young girl, her father and the marquis entered the same landau, and Olivier Bertin remained alone with Musadieu in the Place de l'Opéra.

Suddenly he felt a sort of affection for this man, or rather that natural attraction for a fellow-countryman one meets in a distant land, for he now felt lost in that strange, indifferent crowd, whereas with Musadieu he might still speak of her.

So he took his arm.

"You are not going home now?" said he. "It is a fine night; let us take a walk."

"Willingly."

They went toward the Madeleine, in the midst of the nocturnal crowd possessed by that brief and violent midnight excitement which stirs the Boulevards when the audiences leave the theatres.

Musadieu had a thousand things in his mind, all his subjects for conversation from the moment when Bertin should name his preference; and he let his eloquence loose upon the two or three topics that interested him most. The painter allowed him to run on without listening to him, and holding him by the arm, sure of being able soon to lead him to talk of Annette, he walked along without noticing his surroundings, walled in by his love. He walked, exhausted by that fit of jealousy which had bruised him like a fall, overcome by the conviction that he had nothing more to do in the world.

Musadieu talked without stopping, and Bertin interrupted him, murmuring almost in spite of himself, under the impulse of his fixed idea:

"Annette was charming this evening."

"Yes, delicious!"

The painter added, to prevent Musadieu from taking up the broken thread of his ideas: "She is prettier than her mother ever was."

To this the other agreed absent-mindedly, repeating "Yes, yes, yes!" several times in succession, without his

ıind having yet settled itself on this ew idea.

Olivier endeavored to continue the ıbject, and in order to attract his at-ention by one of Musadieu's own favo-te fads, he continued:

"She will have one of the first salons Paris after her marriage."

That was enough, and the man of shion, as well as the Inspector of ine Arts, being convinced, he began to lk wisely of the social footing on hich the Marquis de Farandal would and in French society.

Bertin listened to him, and fancied nnette in a large salon full of light, rrounded by men and women. This sion, too, made him jealous.

They were now going up the Boule-rd Malesherbes. As they passed the uilleroys' house the painter looked up. ghts seemed to be shining through the ndows, among the openings in the rtains. He suspected that the duchess d the marquis had been invited to me and have a cup of tea. And a rning rage made him suffer terribly. He still held Musadieu by the arm, d once or twice contradicted Musa-eu in expressing his opinions about the ture marquise. Even that common-ce voice in speaking of her caused image to flit beside them in the ht.

When they arrived at the painter's or, in the Avenue de Villiers, Bertin ed: "Will you come in?"

'No, thank you. It is late, and I am ng to bed."

'Oh, come up for half an hour, and 'll have a little more talk."

'No, really. It is too late."

The thought of staying there alone, er the anguish he had just endured, filled Olivier's soul with horror. He had some one with him; he would retain him.

"Do come up; I want you to choose a sketch that I have intended for a long time to offer you."

The other, knowing that painters are not always in a giving mood, and that the remembrance of promises is short, seized the opportunity. In his capacity as Inspector of Fine Arts, he possessed a gallery of paintings that had been skillfully collected.

"I am with you," said he.

They entered.

The valet was aroused and brought some grog; and the talk was for some time all about painting. Bertin showed some studies, and begged Musadieu to take the one that pleased him best; Musadieu hesitated, disturbed by the gaslight, which deceived him as to tones. At last he chose a group of little girls skipping rope on a sidewalk; and then he wished to depart, and take his present with him.

"I will have it taken to your house," said the painter.

"No; I should prefer to have it this very evening, so that I may admire it while I am going to bed," said Musadieu.

Nothing could detain him, and Olivier Bertin found himself again alone in his house, that prison of his memories and of his painful agitation.

When the servant entered the next morning, bringing tea and the newspapers, he found his master sitting up in bed, so pale that he was alarmed.

"Is monsieur indisposed?" he inquired.

"It is nothing—only a little headache."

"Does not monsieur wish me to bring him something?"

"No. What sort of weather is it?"

"It rains, monsieur."

"Very well. That is all."

The man withdrew, having placed on the little table the tea-tray and the newspapers.

Olivier took up the *Figaro* and opened it. The leading article was entitled "Modern Painting." It was a dithyrambic eulogy on four or five young painters who, gifted as colorists, with real ability which they exaggerated for effect, now pretended to be revolutionists and renovators of genius.

As did all the older painters, Bertin sneered at these newcomers, was irritated at their assumption of exclusiveness, and disputed their doctrines. He began to read this article, then, with the rising anger so quickly felt by a nervous person; at last, glancing a little further down, he saw his own name, and these words at the end of a sentence struck him like a blow of the fist full in the chest: "The old-fashioned art of Olivier Bertin."

He had always been sensitive to either criticism or praise, but, at the bottom of his heart, in spite of his legitimate vanity, he suffered more from being criticised than he enjoyed being praised, because of the uneasiness concerning himself which his vacillation had always encouraged. Formerly, however, at the time of his triumphs, the incense offered was so frequent that it made him forget the pin-pricks. Today, before the ceaseless influx of new artists and new admirers, congratulations were more rare and criticism was more marked. He felt that he had been enrolled in the battalion of old painters of talent, whom the younger ones do not treat as masters; and as he was as intelligent as he was perspicacious he suffered now from the least insinuations as much as from direct attacks.

But he never had any wound to his pride as an artist hurt him like this. He remained gasping, and reread the article in order to grasp its every meaning. He and his equals were thrown aside with outrageous disrespect; and he arose murmuring those words, which remained on his lips: "The old-fashioned art of Olivier Bertin."

Never had such sadness, such discouragement, such a sensation of having reached the end of everything, the end of his mental and physical being, thrown him into such desperate distress of soul. He sat until two o'clock in his armchair, before the fireplace, his legs extended toward the fire, not having strength to move, or to do anything. Then the need of being consoled rose within him, the need to clasp devoted hands, to see faithful eyes, to be pitied, succored, caressed with friendly words. So he went, as usual, to the countess.

When he entered, Annette was alone in the drawing room, standing with her back toward him, hastily writing the address on a letter. On a table beside her lay a copy of *Figaro*. Bertin saw the journal at the moment that he saw the young girl and was bewildered, not daring to advance! Oh, if she had read it! She turned, and in a preoccupied, hurried way, her mind haunted with feminine cares, she said to him:

"Ah, good-morning, sir painter! You will excuse me if I leave you? I have a dressmaker upstairs who claims me. You understand that a dressmaker, at

the time of a wedding, is very important. I will lend you mamma, who is talking and arguing with my artist. If I need her I will call her for a few minutes."

And she hastened away, running a little, to show how much she was hurried.

This abrupt departure, without a word of affection, without a tender look for him who loved her so much—so much!—quite upset him. His eyes rested again on the *Figaro,* and he thought: "She has read it! They laugh at me, they deny me. She no longer believes in me. I am nothing to her any more."

He took two steps toward the journal, as one walks toward a man to strike him. Then he said to himself: "Perhaps she has not read it, after all. She is so preoccupied to-day. But someone will undoubtedly speak of it before her, perhaps this evening, at dinner, and that will make her curious to read it."

With a spontaneous, almost unthinking, movement he took the copy, closed it, folded it, and slipped it into his pocket with the swiftness of a thief.

The countess entered. As soon as she saw Olivier's convulsed and livid face, she guessed that he had reached the limit of suffering.

She was impelled toward him, with all the impulse of her poor soul, and of her whole being that was so sorely wounded. Throwing her hands upon his shoulders, and plunging her glance into the depths of his eyes, she said:

"Oh, how unhappy you are!"

This time he did not deny it; his throat swelled with a spasm of pain, and he stammered:

"Yes—yes—yes!"

She felt that he was near weeping, and led him into the darkest corner of the drawing room, toward two armchairs hidden by a small screen of antique silk. They sat down behind this slight embroidered wall, veiled also by the gray shadow of a rainy day.

She resumed, pitying him, deeply moved by his grief:

"My poor Olivier, how you suffer!"

He leaned his white head on the shoulder of his friend.

"More than you believe!" he said.

"Oh, I knew it! I have felt it all. I saw it from the beginning and watched it grow."

He answered as if she had accused him: "It is not my fault, Any."

"I know it well; I do not reproach you for it."

And softly, turning a little, she saw a tear in one of Olivier's eyes.

She started and repeated:

"Ah, poor friend—poor friend—poor friend!"

Then after a moment of silence she added: "It is the fault of our hearts, which never have grown old. I feel that my own is full of life!"

He tried to speak but could not, for now his sobs choked him. She listened, as he leaned against her, to the struggle in his breast. Then, seized by the selfish anguish of love, which had gnawed at her heart so long, she said in the agonized tone in which one realizes a horrible misfortune:

"My God! how you love her!"

Again he confessed: "Ah, yes! I love her!"

She reflected a few moments, then continued: "You never loved me like that?"

He did not deny it, for he was passing through one of those periods in

which one speaks the absolute truth, and he murmured:

"No, I was too young then."

She was surprised.

"Too young? Why?"

"Because life was too sweet. It is only at our age that one loves despairingly."

"Does the love you feel for her resemble that which you felt for me?" the countess asked.

"Yes and no—and yet it is almost the same thing. I have loved you as much as any one can love a woman. As for her, I love her just as I loved you, since she is yourself; but this love has become something irresistible, consuming, stronger than death. I belong to it as a burning house belongs to the fire."

She felt her sympathy wither up under a breath of jealousy; but, assuming a consoling tone, she said:

"My poor friend! In a few days she will be married and gone. When you see her no longer, no doubt you will be cured of this fancy."

He shook his head.

"Oh, I am lost, lost, lost!"

"No, no, I say! It will be three months before you see her again. That will be sufficient. Three months were quite enough for you to learn to love her more than you love me, whom you have known for twelve years!"

Then, in his infinite distress, he implored: "Any, do not desert me!"

"What can I do, my friend?"

"Do not leave me alone."

"I will go to see you as often as you wish."

"No. Keep me here as much as possible."

"But then you would be near her."

"And near you!"

"You must not see her any more before her marriage."

"Oh, Any!"

"Well, at least, not often."

"May I stay here this evening?"

"No, not in your present condition. You must divert your mind; go to the club, or the theatre—no matter where, but do not stay here."

"I entreat you——"

"No, Olivier, it is impossible. And, besides, I have guests coming to dinner whose presence would agitate you still more."

"The duchess and—he?"

"Yes."

"But I spent last evening with them."

"And you speak of it! You are in a fine state to-day."

"I promise to be calm."

"No, it is impossible."

"Then I am going away."

"Why do you hurry now?"

"I must walk."

"That is right! Walk a great deal, walk until evening, kill yourself with fatigue and then go to bed."

He had risen.

"Good-by, Any!"

"Good-by, dear friend. I will come to see you to-morrow evening. Would you like me to do something very imprudent, as I used to do—pretend to lunch here at noon, and then go and have luncheon with you at a quarter past one?"

"Yes, I should like it very much. You are so good!"

"It is because I love you."

"And I love you, too."

"Oh, don't speak of that any more!"

"Good-by, Any."

"Good-by, dear friend, till to-morrow."

"Good-by."

He kissed her hands over and over again, then her brow, then the corner of her lips. His eyes were dry now, his bearing resolute. Just as he was about to go, he threw his arms round her, and pressing his lips to her forehead, he seemed to drink in, to inhale from her all the love she had for him.

Then he departed quickly, without turning toward her again.

When she was alone she sank, sobbing, upon a chair. She would have remained there till night if Annette had not suddenly appeared in search of her. In order to gain time to dry her red eyelids, the countess answered: "I have a little note to write, my child. Go upstairs, and I will join you in a few seconds."

She was compelled to occupy herself with the great affair of the trousseau until evening.

The duchess and her nephew dined with the Guilleroys as a family party. They had just seated themselves at table and were speaking of the opera of the night before when the butler appeared, carrying three enormous bouquets.

Madame de Mortemain was surprised.

"Good gracious! what is that?"

"Oh, how lovely they are!" exclaimed Annette. "Who can have sent them?"

"Olivier Bertin, no doubt," replied her mother.

She had been thinking of him since his departure. He had seemed so gloomy, so tragic, she understood so clearly his hopeless sorrow, she felt so keenly the counter-stroke of that grief, she loved him so much, so entirely, so tenderly that her heart was weighed down by sad presentiments.

In the three bouquets were found three of the painter's cards. He had written on them in pencil, respectively, the names of the countess, the duchess and Annette.

"Is he ill, your friend Bertin?" the duchess inquired. "I thought he looked very ill last night."

"Yes, I am a little anxious about him, although he does not complain," Madame de Guilleroy answered.

"Oh, he is growing old, like all the rest of us," her husband interposed. "He is growing old quite fast, indeed. I believe, however, that bachelors usually go to pieces suddenly. Their breaking-up comes more abruptly than ours. He really is very much changed."

"Ah, yes!" sighed the countess.

Farandal suddenly stopped his whisperings to Annette to say: "The *Figaro* had a very disagreeable article about him this morning."

Any attack, any criticism or allusion unfavorable to her friend's talent always threw the countess into a passion.

"Oh," said she, "men of Bertin's importance need not mind such coarse attacks."

Guilleroy was astonished.

"What!" he exclaimed, "a disagreeable article about Olivier! Why, I did not see it. On what page?"

The marquis informed him: "The first page, at the top, with the title, 'Modern Painting.'"

And the deputy ceased to be astonished. "Oh, that is why! I did not read it because it was about painting."

Every one smiled, knowing that apart from politics and agriculture M. de Guilleroy was interested in very few things.

The conversation turned upon other subjects until they entered the drawing-room to take coffee. The countess was not listening and hardly answered, being pursued by anxiety as to what Olivier might be doing. Where was he? Where had he dined? Where had he taken his hopeless heart at that moment? She now felt a burning regret at having let him go, not to have kept him; and she fancied him roving the streets, so sad and lonely, fleeing under his burden of woe.

Up to the time of the departure of the duchess and her nephew she had hardly spoken, harassed by vague and superstitious fears. Then she went to bed and lay there, her eyes wide open in the darkness, thinking of him!

A long time had passed when she thought she heard the bell of the apartment ring. She started, sat up and listened. A second time the tinkle resounded in the stillness of the night.

She leaped out of bed, and with all her strength pressed the electric button that summoned the maid. Then, candle in hand, she ran to the vestibule.

Through the door she asked: "Who is there?"

"It is a letter," an unknown voice replied.

"A letter! From whom?"

"From a physician."

"What physician?"

"I do not know. It is about some accident."

Hesitating no more, she opened the door, and found herself facing a cab-driver in an oilskin cap. He held a paper in his hand, which he presented to her. She read: "Very urgent—Monsieur le Comte de Guilleroy."

The writing was unknown.

"Enter, my good man," said she. "Sit down and wait for me."

When she reached her husband's door her heart was beating so violently that she could not call him. She pounded on the wood with her metal candlestick. The count was asleep and did not hear.

Then, impatient, nervous, she kicked the door and heard a sleepy voice asking: "Who is there? What time is it?"

"It is I," she called. "I have an urgent letter for you, brought by cabman. There has been some accident."

"Wait! I am getting up. I'll be there," he stammered from behind his bed-curtains.

In another minute he appeared in his dressing-gown. At the same time two servants came running aroused by the ringing of the bell. They were alarmed and bewildered, having seen a stranger sitting on a chair in the dining-room.

The count had taken the letter and was turning it over in his fingers, murmuring: "What is that? I cannot imagine."

"Well, read it, then!" said the countess in a fever.

He tore off the envelope, unfolded the paper, uttered an exclamation of amazement, then looked at his wife with frightened eyes.

"My God! what is it?" said she.

He stammered, hardly able to speak, so great was his emotion: "Oh, a great misfortune—a great misfortune!" Bertin has been run over!"

"Dead!" she cried.

"No, no!" said he. "Read for yourself."

She snatched from his hand the letter he held out and read:

MONSIEUR: A great misfortune has just happened. Your friend, the eminent

artist, M. Olivier Bertin, has been run over by an omnibus, the wheel of which passed over his body. I cannot as yet say anything decisive as to the probable result of this accident, which may not be serious, although it may have an immediate and fatal result. M. Bertin begs you earnestly and entreats Madame la Comtesse de Guilleroy to come to him at once. I hope, monsieur, that Madame la Comtesse and yourself will grant the desire of our friend, who before daylight may have ceased to live.

DR. DE RIVIL.

The countess stared at her husband with great, staring eyes, full of terror. Then suddenly, like an electric shock, she experienced an awakening of that courage which comes to women, which makes them at times, in moments of terror, the most valiant of creatures.

Turning toward her maid, she said: "Quick! I am going to dress."

"What will madame wear?" asked the servant.

"Never mind that. Anything you like. James," she added, "be ready in five minutes."

Returning toward her room, her soul overwhelmed, she noticed the cabman still waiting and said to him: "You have your carriage?"

"Yes, madame."

"That is well. We will take that."

Wildly, with precipitate taste, she threw on her clothes, hooking, clasping, tying and fastening at haphazard. Then, before the mirror, she lifted and twisted her hair without a semblance of order, gazing without thinking of what she was doing at the reflection of her pale face and haggard eyes.

When her cloak was on her shoulders, she rushed to her husband's room, but he was not yet ready. She dragged him along.

"Come, come!" said she; "remember, he may die!"

The count, dazed, followed her stumblingly, feeling his way with his feet on the dark stairs, trying to distinguish the steps, so that he should not fall.

The drive was short and silent. The countess trembled so violently that her teeth rattled, and through the window she saw the flying gas-jets, veiled by the falling rain. The sidewalks gleamed, the Boulevard was deserted, the night was threatening. On arriving, they found that the painter's door was open and that the concierge's lodge was lighted, but empty.

At the top of the stairs the physician, Dr. de Rivil, a little gray man, short, round, very well dressed, extremely polite, came to meet them. He bowed low to the countess and held out his hand to the count.

Breathing rapidly, as if climbing the stairs had exhausted her, she said:

"Well, doctor?"

"Well, madame, I hope that it will be less serious than I at first thought."

"He will not die?" she exclaimed.

"No. At least, I do not believe so."

"Will you answer for that?"

"No. I only say that I hope to find only a simple abdominal contusion without internal lesions."

"What do you call lesions?"

"Ruptures."

"How do you know that there are none?"

"I judge so."

"And if there are?"

"Oh, then it would be serious."

"He might die of them?"

"Yes."

"Very soon?"

"Very soon. In a few minutes or even seconds. But reassure yourself, madame; I am convinced that he will be quite well again in two weeks."

She had listened, with profound attention, to know all and understand all.

"What rupture might he have?"

"A rupture of the liver, for instance."

"That would be very dangerous?"

"Yes—but I should be surprised to find any complication now. Let us go to him. It will do him good, for he awaits you with great impatience."

On entering the room she saw first a pallid face on a white pillow. Some candles and the firelight illumined it, defined the profile, deepened the shadows; and in that pale face the countess saw two eyes that watched her coming.

All her courage, energy and resolution fell, so much did those hollow and altered features resemble those of a dying man. He, whom she had seen only a little while ago, had become this thing, this spectre! "Oh, my God!" she murmured beneath her breath, and she approached him, trembling with horror.

He tried to smile, to reassure her, and the grimace of that attempt was frightful.

When she was beside the bed, she put both hands gently on one of Olivier's, which lay alongside him, and faltered: "Oh, my poor friend!"

"It is nothing," said he in a low tone, without moving his head.

She now looked at him closely, frightened at the change in him. He was so pale that he seemed no longer to have a drop of blood under his skin. His hollow cheeks seemed to have been sucked in from the interior of his face, and his eyes were sunken as if drawn by a string from within.

He saw the terror of his friend and sighed: "Here I am in a fine condition!"

"How did it happen?" she asked, looking at him with fixed gaze.

He was making a great effort to speak, and his whole face twitched with pain.

"I was not looking about me—I was thinking of something else—something very different—oh, yes!—and an omnibus knocked me down and ran over my abdomen."

As she listened she saw the accident, and shaking with terror, she asked: "Did you bleed?"

"No. I am only a little bruised—a little crushed."

"Where did it happen?" she inquired.

"I do not know exactly," he answered in a very low voice; "it was far away from here."

The physician rolled up an armchair, and the countess sank into it. The count remained standing at the foot of the bed, murmuring: "Oh, my poor friend! my poor friend! What a frightful misfortune!"

And he was indeed deeply grieved, for he loved Olivier very much.

"But where did it happen?" the countess repeated.

"I know hardly anything about it myself, or rather I do not understand it at all," the physician replied. "It was at the Gobelins, almost outside Paris! At least, the cabman that brought him home declared to me that he took him from a pharmacy of that quarter, to which some one had carried him, at

nine o'clock in the evening!" Then, leaning toward Olivier, he asked: "Did the accident really happen near the Gobelins?"

Bertin closed his eyes, as if to recollect, then murmured: "I do not know."

"But where were you going?"

"I do not remember now. I was walking straight ahead."

A groan that she could not stifle came from the countess' lips. Then oppressed with a choking that stopped her breathing a few seconds, she drew out her handkerchief, covered her eyes and wept bitterly.

She knew—she guessed! Something intolerable, overwhelming had just fallen on her heart—remorse for not having kept Olivier near her, for driving him away, for throwing him into the street, where, stupefied with grief, he had fallen under the omnibus.

He said in that colorless voice he now had: "Do not weep. It distresses me."

By a tremendous effort of will she ceased to sob, uncovered her eyes and fixed them, wide open, upon him, without a quiver of her face, over which the tears continued to roll slowly.

They looked at each other, both motionless, their hands clasped. They gazed at each other, no longer knowing that any other person was in the room, and that gaze bore a more than human emotion from one heart to the other.

It was between them the swift, silent and terrible evocation of all their memories, of all their love, crushed also; of all they had felt together, of all that had been united and blended in their lives, in that mutual attraction which had made them give themselves to each other.

They gazed at one another, and the need to speak to each other, to hear the thousand intimate, sad things which they had still to say rose irresistibly to their lips. She felt that she must, at any price, send away the two men that stood behind her; she must find a way, some ruse, some inspiration, she, the woman, fruitful in resources! She began to reflect, her eyes always fixed on Olivier.

Her husband and the doctor were talking in undertones, discussing the care of the patient. Turning her head, the countess said to the doctor: "Have you brought a nurse?"

"No, I prefer to send a hospital surgeon, who will keep a better watch over the case."

"Send both. One never can be too careful. Can you get them to-night, for I do not suppose you will stay here till morning?"

"Indeed, I was just about to go home. I have been here four hours already."

"But on your way back you will send us the nurse and the surgeon?"

"It will be difficult in the middle of the night. But I will try."

"You must!"

"They may promise, but will they come?"

"My husband will accompany you and will bring them back either willingly or by force."

"You cannot remain here alone, madame!"

"I?" she exclaimed with a sort of cry of defiance, of indignant protest against any resistance to her will. Then she pointed out, in that authoritative tone to which no one ventures a reply, the necessities of the situation. It was necessary that the nurse and the surgeon should be there within an hour,

to forestall all accident. To insure this, some one must get out of bed and bring them. Her husband alone could do that. During this time she would remain near the injured man, she, for whom it was a duty and a right. She would be simply fulfilling her duty as a friend, her duty as a woman. Besides, she chose to do it, and no one should dissuade her from it.

Her reasoning was sensible. They had to give in, and they decided to obey her.

She had risen, full of the thought of their departure, impatient to know that they were off and that she was left alone. Now, in order that she should commit no error during their absence, she listened, trying to understand perfectly, to remember everything, to forget nothing of the physician's directions. The painter's valet, standing near her, listened also, and behind him his wife, the cook, who had helped in the first bandaging of the patient, indicated by nods of the head that she too understood. When the countess had recited all the instructions like a lesson, she urged the two men to go, repeating to her husband:

"Come back soon; above all things, come back soon!"

"I will take you in my coupé," said the doctor to the count. "It will bring you back quicker. You will be here again in an hour."

Before leaving, the doctor again carefully examined the wounded man, to assure himself that his condition remained satisfactory.

Guilleroy still hesitated.

"You do not think that we are doing anything imprudent?" he asked.

"No," said the doctor. "He needs only rest and quiet. Madame de Guilleroy will see that he does not talk, and will speak to him as little as possible."

The countess was startled and said:

"Then I must not talk to him?"

"Oh, no, madame! Take an armchair and sit beside him. He will not feel that he is alone and will be quite content; but no fatigue of words or even of thoughts. I will call about nine o'clock to-morrow morning. Good-by, madame. I salute you!"

He left the room with a low bow, followed by the count, who repeated:

"Do not worry yourself, my dear. Within an hour I shall return, and then you can go home."

When they were gone, she listened for the sound of the door below being closed, then to the rolling wheels of the coupé in the street.

The valet and the cook still stood there, awaiting orders. The countess dismissed them.

"You may go now," said she; "I will ring if I need anything."

They too withdrew, and she remained alone with him.

She had drawn close to the bed, and putting her hands on the two edges of the pillow, on both sides of that dear face, she leaned over to look upon it. Then, with her face so close to his that she seemed to breathe her words upon it, she whispered:

"Did you throw yourself under that carriage?"

He tried to smile still, saying: "No, the carriage threw itself upon me."

"That is not true; it was you."

"No, I swear to you it was *it!*"

After a few moments of silence, those instants when souls seem mingled in glances, she murmured: "Oh, my dear,

dear Olivier, to think that I let you go, that I did not keep you with me!"

"It would have happened just the same, one day or another," he replied with conviction.

They still gazed at each other, seeking to read each other's inmost thoughts.

"I do not think I shall recover," he said at last. "I am in such pain."

"Do you suffer very much?" she murmured.

"Oh, yes!"

Bending a little lower, she brushed his forhead, then his eyes, then his cheeks with slow kisses, light, delicate as her care for him. She barely touched him with her lips, with that soft little touch that children give when they kiss. This lasted a long time, a very long time. He let that shower of tender kisses fall on him, and they seemed to soothe and refresh him, for his drawn face twitched less than before.

"Any!" he said finally.

She ceased kissing him to listen.

"What, my friend?"

"You must make me a promise."

"I will promise anything you wish."

"If I am not dead before morning, swear to me that you will bring Annette to me, just once, only once! I cannot bear to die without seeing her again. Think that—to-morrow—at this time—perhaps I shall have—shall surely have closed my eyes forever—and that I shall never see you again—you—nor her!"

She stopped him; her heart was breaking.

"Oh, hush—hush! Yes, I promise you to bring her!"

"You swear it?"

"I swear it, my friend. But hush, do not talk any more. You grieve me frightfully—hush!"

A quick convulsion passed over his face. When it had passed he said:

"Since we have only a few minutes more to remain together, do not let us lose them; let us seize them to bid each other good-by. I have loved you so much——"

"And I," she sighed, "how I still love you!"

He spoke again:

"I have never had real happiness except through you. Only these last days have been hard. It was not your fault. Ah, my poor Any, how sad life is!—and how hard it is to die!"

"Hush, Olivier, I implore you!"

He continued, without listening to her: "I should have been such a happy man if you had not had your daughter——"

"Hush! My God! Hush!"

He seemed to dream rather than speak.

"Ah, he that invented this existence and made men was either blind or very wicked."

"Olivier, I entreat you—if you ever have loved me, be quiet, do not talk like that any more!"

He looked at her, leaning over him, she herself so pale that she looked as if she were dying, too; and he was silent.

Then she seated herself in the armchair, close to the bed, and again took the hand on the coverlet.

"Now I forbid you to speak," said she. "Do not stir, and think of me as I think of you."

Again they looked at each other, motionless, joined together by the burning contact of their hands. She pressed, with gentle movement, the feverish

hand she clasped and he answered these calls by tightening his fingers a little. Each pressure said something to them, evoked some period of their finished past, revived in their memory the stagnant recollections of their love. Each was a secret question, each was a mysterious reply, sad questions and sad replies, those "do you remembers?" of a bygone love.

Their minds, in this agonizing meeting, which might be the last, travelled back through the years, through the whole history of their passion; and nothing was audible in the room save the crackling of the fire.

Suddenly, as if awakening from a dream, he said, with a start of terror:

"Your letters!"

"What? My letters?" she queried.

"I might have died without destroying them!"

"Oh, what does that matter to me? That is of no consequence now. Let them find them and read them—I don't care!"

"I will not have that," he said. "Get up, Any; open the lowest drawer of my desk, the large one. They are all there, all. You must take them and throw them into the fire."

She did not move at all, but remained crouching, as if he had counseled her to do something cowardly.

"Any, I entreat you!" he continued; "if you do not do this, you will torture me, unnerve me, drive me mad. Think—they may fall into any one's hands, a notary, a servant or even your husband—I do not wish——"

She rose, still hesitating and repeating:

"No, that is too hard, too cruel! I feel as if you were compelling me to burn both our hearts!"

He supplicated her, his face drawn with pain.

Seeing him suffer thus, she resigned herself and walked toward the desk. On opening the drawer, she found it filled to the edge with a thick packet of letters, piled one on top of another, and she recognized on all the envelopes the two lines of the address she had written so often. She knew them—those two lines—a man's name, the name of a street—as well as she knew her own name, as well as one can know the few words that have represented to us in life all hope and all happiness. She looked at them, those little square things that contained all she had known how to express of her love, all that she could take of herself to give to him with a little ink on a bit of white paper.

He had tried to turn his head on the pillow that he might watch her, and again he said: "Burn them, quick!"

Then she took two handfuls, holding them a few seconds in her grasp. They seemed heavy to her, painful, living, at the same time dead, so many different things were in them, so many things that were now over—so sweet to feel, to dream! It was the soul of her soul, the heart of her heart, the essence of her loving self that she was holding there; and she remembered with what delirium she had scribbled some of them, with what exaltation, what intoxication of living and of adoring some one, and of expressing it.

"Burn them! burn them, Any!" Olivier repeated.

With the same movement of both hands she cast into the fireplace the two packets of papers, which became scat-

tered as they fell upon the wood. Then she seized those that remained in the desk and threw them on top of the others, then another handful, with swift movements, stooping and rising again quickly, to finish as soon as might be this terrible task.

When the fireplace was full and the drawer empty, she remained standing, waiting, watching the almost smothered flames as they crept up from all sides on that mountain of envelopes. They attacked them first at the edges, gnawed at the corners, ran along the edge of the paper, went out, sprang up again and went creeping on and on. Soon, all around that white pyramid glowed a vivid girdle of clear fire which filled the room with light; and this light, illuminating the woman standing and the man dying, was their love being consumed, their love turning to ashes.

The countess turned, and in the dazzling light of that fire she beheld her friend leaning, with a haggard face, over the edge of the bed.

"Are they all there?" he demanded.

"Yes, all."

But before returning to him she cast a last look upon that destruction, and on that mass of papers already half consumed, twisting and turning black, she saw something red flowing. It looked like drops of blood, and seemed to come out of the very heart of the letters, as from a wound; it ran slowly toward the flames, leaving a purple train.

The countess felt in her soul a shock of supernatural terror, and recoiled as if she had seen the assassination of a human being; then she suddenly understood that she had seen simply the melting of the wax seals.

She returned to the wounded man, and lifting his head tenderly, laid it back in the centre of the pillow. But he had moved, and his pain increased. He was gasping now, his face drawn by fearful suffering, and he no longer seemed to know that she was there.

She waited for him to become a little calmer, to open his eyes, which remained closed, to be able to say one word more to her.

Presently she asked: "Do you suffer much?"

He did not reply.

She bent over him and laid a finger on his forehead to make him look at her. He opened his eyes then, but they were wild and dazed.

Terrified, she repeated: "Do you suffer? Olivier! Answer me! Shall I call? Make an effort! Say something to me!"

She thought she heard him murmur: "Bring her—you swore to me——"

Then he writhed under the bedclothes, his body grew rigid, his face was convulsed from pain.

"Olivier! my God! Olivier!" she cried. "What is the matter? Shall I call?"

This time he heard her, for he replied: "No—it is nothing."

He appeared to grow easier, in fact, to suffer less, to fall suddenly into a sort of drowsy stupor. Hoping that he would sleep, she sat down again beside the bed, took his hand and waited. He moved no more, his chin had dropped to his breast, his mouth was half opened by his short breath, which seemed to rasp his throat in passing. Only his fingers moved involuntarily now and then, with slight tremors which the countess felt to the roots of her hair, making her long to cry out. They were no more the tender little meaning

pressures which, in place of the weary lips, told of all the sadness of their hearts; they were spasms of pain which spoke only of the torture of the body.

Now she was frightened, terribly frightened, and had a wild desire to run away, to ring, to call, but she dared not move, lest she might disturb his repose.

She heard the distant sound of carriages in the street and listened to see if one did not stop at the door, to see if her husband was not coming back to rescue her, to snatch her from this terrible *tête-à-tête*.

As she tried to disengage her hand from Olivier's he tightened his clasp and uttered a deep sigh. So she resigned herself to waiting, for fear of agitating him.

The fire was dying in the grate, smothered by the black ashes of the letters; two of the candles went out; a piece of furniture crackled.

All was silent in the house, all seemed dead, except the Flemish clock on the stairs, which unfailingly chimed the hour, the half and the quarter, chanting through the night the march of Time in various modulations of tone.

The countess, motionless, felt an intolerable terror coming over her. She saw visions, frightful thoughts came into her mind, and she seemed to feel Olivier's fingers growing cold in her clasp. Could it be? No, of course not! But what was this indescribable sensation as of touching ice? She rose, wild with terror, to look at his face. It was relaxed, impassive, lifeless, indifferent to all sorrow, suddenly restored to peace by Eternal Oblivion.

THE END

VOLUME VII

DOCTOR HÉRACLIUS GLOSS

DOCTOR HÉRACLIUS GLOSS

Synopsis and prefatory notice by Jean Ossola in the Revue de Paris

THIS story was found among other papers in the possession of Laura de Maupassant, mother of the author, at her death in 1921.

It was not included in the collection of Maupassant's works published by M. Conard, because the author himself had not appeared inclined to give it publicity, and also because it did not agree in style and general character with Maupassant's later work.

Although belonging to his earliest period it is a finished product, and reveals a tendency toward the Voltarian manner.

It must have been composed between the years 1875 and 1877.

Though Maupassant was in full health and vigor at the time of its composition, sound, both physically and morally, even then he betrayed a note of pessimism to which he had been subject from early youth, and this may have influenced the critics, later on, to dwell so much upon certain hallucinations which this author could depict so graphically and with such mordant intensity.

The Revue de Paris holds that this little work commands interest by having been composed at a period when Maupassant was devoting himself to the formation of his permanent future literary style, all his masterpieces belonging to a much later date; also that the public curiosity in the work should be recognized.

CHAPTER I

THE MORAL ASPECT OF DOCTOR HÉRACLIUS GLOSS

A VERY learned man was Doctor Héraclius Gloss.

Although not even the slightest literary production appearing under his name had ever been found in the book stores of the town, nevertheless everybody in the academic city of Balançon looked upon Doctor Héraclius as a very erudite personage.

How was he a doctor, and of what? No one could say.

It was merely known that his father and grandfather before him had been given the title of "doctor" by their fellow citizens. He inherited this title together with their name and possessions; in his family it was "doctor" from father to son, just as the patronymic Héraclius Gloss was similarly handed down.

For that matter, however, even if he did not hold a diploma, signed and

countersigned, by all the members of some learned faculty, Doctor Héraclius was none the less a very worthy and erudite individual. A glance at the forty shelves, filled with books, covering the four walls of his spacious study, would leave a strong impression that a more scholarly doctor had never reflected credit upon the city of Balançon. Indeed whenever any reference was made to the Doctor in the presence of the Dean and the Rector of the University, the two latter would smile significantly. It is said also that, on one occasion, the Rector having delivered a glowing eulogy of Doctor Gloss, in the Latin tongue, before His Eminence the Archbishop, a witness of the scene, cited as an irrefutable proof of the Doctor's reputed attainments, the following words which he had overheard:

"Parturiunt montes nascitur ridiculus mus."

"The mountains are in labor and an absurd mouse is born."

Furthermore, both the Dean and the Rector dined with him every Sunday; thus nobody would dare challenge the assertion that Doctor Héraclius Gloss was a very learned individual.

CHAPTER II

THE PHYSICAL ASPECT OF DOCTOR HÉRACLIUS GLOSS

If it be true, as is claimed by some philosophers, that complete harmony exists between the moral and the physical aspect of a man, and that one can read in the lines of the countenance the leading traits of a person's character; in that case, Doctor Héraclius Gloss bore out the truth of the assertion.

He was small of stature, wiry and nervous; in him could be detected the characteristics of the rat, the ant, and the fox terrier; in other words he belonged to the category of investigators, rodents, hunters, and was of the persistent type.

Looking at him it was hard to imagine that all the doctrines he had imbibed could have entered into that small cranium of his, but rather that he himself would penetrate into the domain of science and subsist by gnawing away upon it, as some rat might do in the interior of a bulky volume.

What was most striking in his appearance was the singular slenderness of his person; his friend the Dean claimed, maybe with some plausibility, that he must have been lost sight of during several centuries, embedded in the leaves of some large in-folio between a rose and a violet, for he was always scrupulously dressed and was very partial to perfume.

So slender was his figure, so much of a razor blade, so to speak, that the temples of his gold spectacles projecting far behind the back of his ears, created the impression of a long cross-tree on the mast of a ship.

The Rector of the Faculty of Balan-

çon remarked of him at different times, that "had he not been the learned Doctor Héraclius he really would have made an excellent paper cutter."

He wore a wig, dressed carefully, was never ill, liked animals, did not detest his own species, and loved toasted quail.

CHAPTER III

HOW DOCTOR HÉRACLIUS GLOSS SPENT TWELVE HOURS DAILY

As soon as the Doctor had risen, had massaged and shaved, and partaken of a small buttered roll with a cup of vanilla chocolate, he made his way to the garden. It was like the gardens in most towns; not very extensive, but pleasant, shady, full of flowers, almost contemplative, if I may be allowed such an expression. If one should draw a picture in imagination of the ideal garden of a philosopher seeking after truth, one would not be far from identifying it with the garden around which Doctor Héraclius Gloss walked at a smart pace three or four times in succession, before reveling in the daily dish of toasted quail at his second breakfast. He claimed that this morning exercise, on getting out of bed, was excellent for the health; it stimulated the circulation of the blood, somewhat stagnated by sleep, cleared vapors from the brain, and aided the digestive system.

After that, the Doctor breakfasted. Then, as soon as he had taken his coffee, which he tossed off at one gulp, for he never lingered at the table until the drowsy process of digestion could affect him, he donned his overcoat and went out. Every day after having passed the Faculty Building, and compared the time by his old-fashioned Louis XV chronometer, with the hour indicated on the lofty dial of the University clock, he would disappear in the alley of the Old Pigeons from which he subsequently emerged, only to return home and dine.

What then did Doctor Héraclius Gloss find to do in the alley of the Old Pigeons? What was he doing? Good Heavens! Why! he was seeking after philosophical truth, and this is how:

In this obscure and squalid little side street, all the bookstores of Balançon seemed to have found their home. It would have required years to read the titles alone, of all the strange assortment of books that could be found stacked from cellar to attic, in the fifty or more dilapidated buildings that composed the Ruelle des Vieux Pigeons, or The Alley of the Old Pigeons.

Doctor Héraclius Gloss seemed to look upon the alley, the buildings in it, the bookdealers and the books themselves, as his own special appurtenances.

It happened more than once that some second hand book dealer, just about to retire for the night, would detect some unusual noise in the upper story of his premises, and after tiptoeing noiselessly up the staircase by the light of a huge torch, a relic of

former days, discovered Doctor Héraclius, buried waist-deep in a pile of books, holding in one hand an end of a candle which was guttering between his fingers, and with the other hand turning over the pages of some ancient manuscript in which he was hoping he might discover truth; and then the poor doctor would be surprised to learn that the belfry clock had struck the hour of nine long since, and that, consequently, his dinner would be spoiled.

The fact is that Doctor Héraclius was a diligent researcher. He was well versed in all the ancient and modern systems of philosophy. He had studied the Hindu sects and the form of worship of the African negroes; there was no tribe, however insignificant, among the northern barbarians, or among the savages of the south with whose religious faiths he was unacquainted.

But alas! alas! the further he studied, searched, delved and meditated, the less did he arrive at any definite conclusion!

"My friend," he observed one evening to the Rector, "how much happier than ourselves are the Columbuses who brave the seas in search of New Worlds! They have but to go straight ahead. The difficulties which they have to encounter are but material obstacles which a courageous man can always overcome, while, as for us, always tossed about in the sea of uncertainty, we find ourselves carried away of a sudden, by some hypothesis; just as a vessel is caught up in a squall, we who suddenly come across a conflicting theory, comparable to a contrary gale, are similarly borne away, then driven back, without hope, to the very port from which we first set sail."

One evening that he was philosophising with the Dean he remarked to the latter:

"How true it is, my dear friend, to represent Truth as dwelling at the bottom of a well . . . the buckets are lowered but draw up only clear water."

"I leave you to guess," he added, smiling significantly.

*"Comment j'ecris le mot seau.**

How I would spell the word buckets."

This was the only pun he had ever been known to perpetrate.

* The word "seau," meaning bucket, has the same sound as 'sot,' a dunce or blockhead, hence the play upon words. The meaning being, that dunces could not draw up Truth from the bottom of the well.

CHAPTER IV

THE MANNER IN WHICH DOCTOR HÉRACLIUS EMPLOYED THE TWELVE NOCTURNAL HOURS

When Doctor Héraclius returned to his house, he was more bulky, as a rule, than when he had departed from it. The reason of this, being, that every one of his pockets, and he had eighteen of them, was stuffed with ancient philosophical treatises that he had just purchased in the Alley of the Old Pigeons.

The Rector facetiously declared that if a chemist had analyzed Doctor Gloss at that moment, it would be found that old paper constituted two thirds of the Doctor's make up.

At seven o'clock, Héraclius Gloss sat down to dinner, and while partaking of his meal, glanced over the old books which he had lately acquired.

At half past eight, the Doctor rose from the table in a magisterial manner; no longer the alert and lively little man that he had been all day, but at present the grave thinker whose forehead was contracted beneath the weight of lofty meditations, just as the frame of a porter sags beneath an unwonted burden.

After having pronounced in a majestic tone to his housekeeper the formula "at home to nobody" he then would disappear within his study; once there, he sat down at his work table, littered with books, and . . . allowed full play to his imagination.

What a strange spectacle for anyone who could have penetrated into the Doctor's innermost thoughts. . . .

A monstrous procession of the most opposite divinities and inconsistent beliefs, a fantastic jumbling of doctrines and hypotheses. It was comparable to some arena where the champions of all these philosophies met in some gigantic tournament. The Doctor amalgamated, combined, or blended the ancient Eastern occultism together with the German materialism; the ethics of the Apostles together with the teachings of Epicurus. He attempted various combinations of doctrines, just as in the laboratories various chemical combinations are attempted, but without ever seeing the resultant truth he so ardently desired bubble to the surface. His good friend the Rector maintained that this philosophical truth, everlastingly expected, bore a great resemblance to the philosopher's stone . . . stone of offence however.

At midnight the Doctor retired and his sleeping dreams were similar to those of his waking moments.

CHAPTER V

HOW THE DEAN ATTRIBUTED EVERYTHING TO ECLECTICISM, THE DOCTOR TO REVELATION, AND THE RECTOR TO DIGESTION

One evening that the Dean, the Rector, and the Doctor were together in the latter's spacious study, they were holding a most interesting discussion.

"My friend," said the Dean, "one should be an Eclectic and an Epicurean. Choose that which is good, discard what is evil. Philosophy is really one vast garden which extends over the surface of the whole earth. Gather together the dazzling Eastern petals, the pale Northern flora, violets of the woods, roses of the garden, compose a bouquet of these and discover its fragrance. If its perfume is not the most exquisite that can be imagined, it is, at any

rate, a most agreeable one, and far more delicious than that exhaled by any single separate flower—even the most fragrant known to exist."

"More varied by all means," retorted the Doctor, "but sweeter I do not admit; if you can find the flower which unites and concentrates in itself all the perfumes of the others; for in your bouquet you could not prevent certain odors from neutralizing each other, as in philosophy certain beliefs would conflict with each other. Truth is single.—You, with your Eclecticism, can obtain but a patchwork of pieces and fragments to represent truth—I myself was formerly an Eclectic, now I am an Exclusive. What I desire in the matter of Truth is not a chance approximation, a close resemblance, but the actual reality. I hold that every thinking man is on the trail of Truth, and the day he meets it in his path, he will at once recognize it and exclaim: 'There it is!' Just as with beauty; now, to take my own case; up to the age of twenty-five years I had not experienced love; I certainly had encountered many beautiful women, but they meant nothing to me. To make up the ideal being which I held in contemplation, it would be necessary to take some one quality from each of them, and even then the result would be the same as in the case of the bouquet of which you were speaking a short while ago; in this way perfect beauty is not to be obtained, for, like gold and truth, it cannot be subdivided into its component parts; it is irreducible. However, one day I did meet this woman; I understood; it was the woman I was seeking and she captivated my love."

The Doctor, somewhat moved, ceased speaking. The Rector, looking toward the Dean, smiled faintly. After a short pause Héraclius Gloss resumed:

"It is from Revelation everything is to be looked for. It was Revelation that enlightened Paul the Apostle on the road to Damascus and made him adopt the Christian tenets. . . ."

"Which are not reliable;" laughingly observed the Rector, "since you yourself do not believe in them, consequently, Revelation is no surer a guide than Eclecticism."

"Pardon me, my friend," the Doctor continued: "Paul was not a philosopher; he had a revelation of a kind, a near revelation; his mind, however, was incapable of grasping absolute truth, which is an abstraction, but philosophy has progressed since then, and the day when some chance accident, a book maybe, or a remark, will reveal it to some man sufficiently enlightened to understand, it will thrill him instantaneously, and all superstitions will fade away before it as the stars at the rising of the sun."

"Amen," ejaculated the Rector, "but the next day you would have a second illuminated one, and a third, the day after, and they would fling their revelations at the heads of one another, fortunately not very dangerous missiles."

"Then you believe in nothing?" retorted the Doctor, who was commencing to feel irritation.

"I believe in Digestion," gravely replied the Rector. "I can swallow with indifference all beliefs, all dogmas, all moralities, all superstitions, all hypotheses and all illusions; just as in partaking of a good dinner, I enjoy equally the soup, the hors d'œvre, the roasts, the vegetables, side dishes and dessert;

after which I lay myself down philosophically to rest, with the assurance that an easy digestion will bring me pleasant slumber for the night, life and health for the ensuing day."

"If you take my advice," hurriedly interposed the Dean, "we will pursue the comparison no further."

An hour later, as they were leaving the house of the learned Héraclius, the Rector broke out into a sudden laugh, and observed:

"That poor Doctor! if Truth reveals itself to him like that beloved woman did, he certainly will be the most deluded man on earth."

At this point a drunken individual who had been striving to get into his house, fell over from alarm, on hearing the loud guffaw of the Dean, whose deep sonorous bass contrasted with the shrill falsetto of the Rector.

CHAPTER VI

HOW THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS OF THE DOCTOR TURNED OUT TO BE THE ALLEY OF THE OLD PIGEONS, AND HOW TRUTH REVEALED ITSELF TO HIM IN THE SHAPE OF AN ANCIENT MANUSCRIPT DEALING WITH METEMPSYCHOSIS

On the seventeenth of March of the year of our Lord 17—, the Doctor awoke almost in a fever. He had dreamed several times during the night of a tall man in white, garbed in antique fashion, who had touched him on the forehead uttering words which were unintelligible to him, and this dream appeared to the learned Héraclius to be a very significant warning. Why a warning? . . . in what did its significance consist?

The Doctor could not clearly understand but he was in full expectation of developments following this presage.

After his breakfast, he made his way, as usual, to the Alley of the Old Pigeons and as the clock was striking twelve entered the doorway of No. 31, occupied by one Nicolas Bricolet, a costumer, a dealer in second hand furniture and books, and in spare moments a repairer of ancient footwear; in other words, a cobbler.

The Doctor, as though moved by an inspiration, ascended straight to the attic, laid his hand on the third tier of a Louis XIII cupboard, and took from it a voluminous vellum manuscript which bore this title:

"My eighteen metemphsychoses; Story of my existences since the year 184, of the so-called Christian era."

The introduction, which Héraclius Gloss deciphered forthwith, followed immediately after this singular title.

"This manuscript which contains a faithful account of my transmigrations, was begun by me in the Roman City in the year CLXXXIV, of the Christian era, as is stated above.

"I am signing this explanation which is destined to enlighten human beings upon the alternate reappearances of the

soul, this sixteenth of April, 1748, in the town of Balançon, where the vicissitudes of my destiny have now cast me.

"It will suffice for any enlightened man, and one whose mind is preoccupied with philosophic problems, to peruse these pages, for the light to strike him in a most signal manner.

"I will therefore trace in a few lines the substance of my life story, which one can read further on, if endowed with a knowledge of the Latin, Greek, German, Italian, Spanish and French languages; for at different periods in my reappearances in human shape, I have lived among these different races. Then I shall explain by what connection of ideas, what psychological precautions, and what technical methods of memorizing I arrived unfailingly at results which demonstrate the truth of metempsychosis.

"In the year 84, I dwelt in Rome and was a philosopher. One day as I was walking along the Appian Way, it entered my thoughts that Pythagoras might have been but as the twilight, still obscure, preceding a glorious dawn. From that moment I had but one desire, one aim, one constant preoccupation; this was to trace or recall my former existences. Alas! all my efforts were in vain, I could recall nothing of the previous stages.

"But one day, I noticed by chance on the pedestal of a statue of Jupiter which stood in the atrium, an inscription I had made upon it in my youth, and this inscription in its turn called back to my mind some event which I had completely forgotten since that time. This was like a flash of light to me; I realized that if a few years, even a single night, on some occasions, were sufficient to blot out a memory of things which had occurred, how far greater was the probability that things which have happened in previous states, and between which happenings the slumberous gap of intermediate and animal stages of existence had intervened, might totally escape our memory.

"Then I engraved my story on stone tablets, hoping that destiny might some day replace it before my eyes and that it would be, for me, like the inscription which was rediscovered on the pedestal of my statue.

"What I was hoping for eventually happened. A century afterwards, being then an architect by profession, I had been commissioned to tear down an ancient building and construct a palace on the former site.

"The workmen in my employ brought me one day a broken and inscribed stone they had discovered, in digging the foundations; I started to decipher it, and while reading, the life of him who had traced these characters, fitful gleams of a forgotten past flashed through my memory. By degrees the matter appeared clear to my mind; I understood, I recalled. It was I myself who had inscribed this very stone.

"But during this interval of a century, what had I done, what had I been? In what shape had I suffered? Nothing could make this clear to me.

"I obtained finally a kind of a clue, but one so faint and so shadowy that it could barely be termed such. An old man, a neighbor of mine, related to me how Rome had been highly diverted, fifty years previously (just nine months prior to my birth), by an adventure that had happened to the Sen-

ator Marcus Antonius Cornelius Lipa.

"His wife, who was a beauty and reputed to be wayward, had purchased from the Phenician merchants a great ape to which she had become much attached. The Senator Cornelius Lipa became jealous of the affection of his spouse for the quadrumane with the man's face, and destroyed the animal. While listening to this narrative, I had a vague intuition that I was that ape, and that in that shape I had suffered long, as if aware of my degradation from a superior condition. But I could not establish a very clear or solid foundation on which to proceed. I was led, nevertheless, to adopt this hypothesis conclusively, for it is, at any rate, a most plausible one.

"Existence in an animal form is a punishment inflicted on the soul for crimes committed in the guise of a human in a previous state of existence. Recollection of a superior condition of anterior life is allowed to the animal so as to chastise it by a sense of its degradation.

"Only the soul purified by suffering can resume the human form; it then loses all recollection of its vicissitudes in the form of animals, since it has become regenerated, and therefore, this knowledge would constitute for it an undeserved chastisement. Therefore man should protect and respect the animal in the same degree that he shows consideration for the guilty one who expiates a fault, and so that others may protect him in his turn should he reappear in such a shape. Which brings us back very closely to the formula of Christian morality: 'Do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you.' It will be seen by the recital of my metempsychoses, how I was fortunate enough to find my memoirs in each one of my existences; how I rewrote them on brass tablets, then on Egyptian papyrus and lastly, at a much later date, on German parchment which I now am using.

"I have now to draw the philosophic conclusions to be gathered from this doctrine.

"All systems of philosophy have been halted by the inscrutable problem of the soul's destiny. The Christian dogmas of our day teach us that the Divinity will collect the upright in a Paradise and dispatch the wicked to a Hades where they will burn together with the evil one.

"Modern common sense, however, disbelieves in a Divinity with the visage of a patriarch sheltering the souls of the worthy beneath his wings, like a hen does her chickens; furthermore, reason contradicts the Christian dogmas.

"Paradise can be located in no particular spot and Hades similarly can be definitely located nowhere.

"Since space is illimitable and is filled with worlds similar to our own, since by multiplying the successive generations that have occupied this globe from the commencement by the generations that have swarmed in the innumerable inhabited worlds like ours, such an incalculable and uncountable number of souls would be arrived at, the factors also being unlimited, that the Divinity would certainly grow confused, however clear headed Lucifer would be in the same predicament, which would result in a disastrous confusion.

"Since the number of the souls of the just is unlimited as also the number of the souls of the wicked, and as

space itself is without limit, it follows that Paradise and Hades would also have to be infinite, or in other words Paradise would be everywhere, and Hades everywhere, which amounts to the same thing as nowhere.

"Reason, however, does not conflict with the doctrine of metempsychosis.

"The soul passing from the snake to the swine, from the swine to the bird, from the bird to the dog, arrives at last to the ape and to man. Then it recommences at each new relapse of which it has been guilty, until it reaches the acme of terrestrial purification, from which it migrates into a higher sphere; thus the soul ceaselessly passing from one animal to another, graduating from the most imperfect to the most perfect, arrives at length in the planet of supreme felicity, whence some new fault may once more precipitate it into the regions of supreme suffering, where it will recommence its transmigrations.

"The circle, a universal and fateful figure encloses therefore the vicissitudes of our existences, as it also governs the evolutions of worlds."

CHAPTER VII

HOW A VERSE OF CORNEILLE MAY BEAR TWO DIFFERENT MEANINGS

Doctor Héraclius had scarcely finished reading this strange document when he stood as if paralyzed with amazement, and forthwith purchased it without any bargaining, for twelve livres and eleven sous. The dealer claiming that it was a Hebrew manuscript discovered in the excavations at Pompeii.

For four days and four nights the Doctor did not quit his study, and succeeded, at last, by dint of patience and with the help of dictionaries to unravel, more or less, the meaning of the German and Spanish portions of the manuscript, for though he was acquainted with Greek, Latin, and some Italian, he was almost totally ignorant of German and Spanish. But as last, fearing he might have fallen into some nonsensical errors, he begged his friend the Rector, who knew both these languages perfectly, to go over the translation. The Rector did this with pleasure, but it was three days before he could settle down seriously to the task, for every time his eye fell upon the Doctor's version, he broke into such a prolonged and noisy fit of laughter, that it nearly brought about an actual syncope. On being asked the reason for this extraordinary hilarity:

"The cause?" he replied, "to begin with there are three of them. 1. The droll countenance of my worthy colleague Héraclius. 2. His illuminating translation, which bears as much resemblance to the original as a guitar does to a windmill. 3. The original text itself, which is of the strangest nature imaginable."

Oh! that obstinate Rector! Nothing could convince him. If the sun itself had come to him to singe his beard and his hair, he would have taken it

for a candle.

Doctor Héraclius Gloss was now radiant, illumined, transformed; like Paulinus, he would exclaim repeatedly:

"Je vois, Je sens, Je crois, Je suis desabusé." *

* The word 'desabusé' signifies undeceived; as employed by the Rector, divided into two parts, the sound is not changed but the meaning is completely reversed.

"I see, I feel, I believe, I am undeceived."

The Rector interrupted each of these outbursts, remarking dryly:

"You should rather say:

"Je vois, Je sens, Je crois, Je suis des abusés.

I see, I feel, I believe, I am one of the deceived."

CHAPTER VIII

EXPLAINS HOW, AND FOR A SIMILAR REASON, ONE MAY BE MORE ROYALIST THAN THE KING, MORE DEVOUT THAN THE POPE, AND ALSO MORE OF A METEMPSYCHOSIST THAN PYTHAGORAS HIMSELF

WHATEVER may be the joy of the shipwrecked who, after having drifted for long days and weary nights upon the surface of the immense expanse of sea, lost on a fragile raft, without mast, sail, compass or hope, suddenly descries the shore so ardently desired, this degree of joy was insignificant as compared with that which flooded the whole being of Héraclius Gloss, when, after having been tossed about amidst philosophical shoals and breakers, he at length entered, triumphant and illuminated, into the harbor of Metempsychosis.

The truth of this doctrine had so impressed him that he embraced it then and there with all its logical extremes. Nothing, now, was obscure to his mind, and in a few days, by a series of calculations combined with meditations, he was able to fix the exact date at which a man who had died in such and such a year would reappear on earth.

He claimed to know, approximately, the date of all the transmigrations of a soul in the inferior creatures, and according to the amount of good or evil presumed to have been accomplished in the final period of a human existence, he could designate the moment when this soul would enter into the body of a snake, a pig, a cart-horse, an ox, a dog, an elephant or a monkey. The reappearance of the same soul in the body of a superior order of animal would occur at regular intervals, whatever may have been the former lapses or faults.

Thus the degree of chastisement, always in proportion to the degree of guilt, consisted, not so much in the longer or shorter duration of exile in animal form, as it did in the longer or shorter imprisonment of the soul, in the body of some unclean beast.

The scale of these inferior creatures began with the snake or the hog and

culminated in the ape, "in reality a man devoid of speech" according to the Doctor; his excellent friend the Rector would retort, that by parity of reasoning, Héraclius Gloss was but an ape gifted with speech.

CHAPTER IX

THE REVERSE OF THE MEDAL

Doctor Héraclius was exceedingly happy for the few days following his surprising discovery. He lived in an atmosphere of profound joy. He was radiant on account of the difficulties that had been overcome, the mysterious now unveiled, and the realization of his great hopes. He existed in a heaven of metempsychosis. It appeared to him as if a veil had been suddenly rent apart and that his eyes were now opened to the unknown.

He seated his dog beside him at the table, he appeared to hold serious conferences with the animal in a corner by the fireplace, endeavoring to trace in the eyes of the poor innocent beast the mystery of its previous existences.

He could, however, detect two dark spots in his happiness, these were the Dean and the Rector.

The Dean shrugged his shoulders with indignation, every time that Héraclius attempted to bring him over to the doctrine of metempsychosis, and the Rector tormented him with pleasantries of a most unsuitable character. This was especially intolerable to him. No sooner did the Doctor expound his views than the satanic Rector would agree with him overprofusely. The Rector assumed the rôle of a disciple listening to the words of some great master, and would suggest the most unlikely genealogies of animal descent, for all the members of their environment. In this manner, for instance, he would assert that Father Labonde, the bell ringer of the Cathedral, could have been nothing else but a melon at the date of his first transmigration, and that he had changed but little since that period, being contented to ring morning and evening the bell on glass frame beneath which he had originally sprouted. He declared that the Abbé Rosencroix, the senior Vicar of the St. Eulalie must clearly have been a raven, shaking down nuts from the boughs; for the priest's gown and other attributes were common to both. Then, inverting the rôles in the most deplorable manner, he went on to say that the druggist Maitre Bocaille was merely a degenerate type of ibis, since the druggist was compelled to employ an instrument for so simple a remedy as an injection, which, according to Herodotus, this sacred bird could administer to itself by merely using its long beak for that purpose.

CHAPTER X

HOW AN ITINERANT SHOWMAN MAY BE MORE ASTUTE THAN A LEARNED DOCTOR

Doctor Héraclius did not on this account allow his ardor to be dampened in the research of further discoveries. From this time forward every animal held for him a mysterious significance. It was not the animal which he really visualized, but the human under that outward covering, that was undergoing purgation; from the exterior appearance alone of this expiatory skin the Doctor could estimate the degree of previous culpable transgressions.

One day that he was walking in the public square of Balançon, he observed a large wooden construction from which an unearthly roaring fell upon his ears, whilst on a raised outside platform the public was invited by an invertebrated clown to enter and witness the performance of the terrible Apache wild beast tamer Tomahawk, otherwise known as Rolling Thunder.

Héraclius felt impressed, he paid the ten centimes admission and entered the building. Oh Fortune, the protectress of lofty minds! . . . Scarcely had he set foot inside than he noticed an immense cage bearing this inscription in three words, that flashed before his dazzled eyes, "Wild Forest Man." The Doctor instantly thrilled with the nervous tremor that accompanies violent mental emotions, and approached the cage palpitating with excitement. In it he perceived a huge ape, quietly seated on its haunches, with its legs crossed after the fashion of tailors and of Turks; and in the presence of this superb specimen of man in his penultimate stage of transmigration, Héraclius paled with joy and lost himself in the deepest meditation. At the end of a few minutes the Wild Forest Man, realizing doubtless the irresistible sympathy that had at once sprung up in the heart of the Town Man who was gazing intently at the creature, made such a hideous grimace at his regenerated brother that it caused the Doctor's hair to stand on end. Then after performing a fantastic pirouette absolutely beneath the dignity of any man, even the most abandoned, this citizen with the four hands indulged in quite indecent hilarity under the very eyes of the Doctor; the latter however, was not shocked at the gaiety of this victim of ancient errors. On the contrary indeed, he saw in this behaviour an additional point of resemblance to the human species and an increased probability of kinship. His scientific curiosity grew so strong that he resolved to buy this master grimacer, at whatever cost, so as to be able to study him at leisure. What an honor for himself, what a triumph for his grand doctrine thought the Doctor if he succeeded, at last, in getting in touch with the animal side of humanity, both to understand the poor ape and also to be able to make himself understood!

Naturally the showman indulged in unstinted praise of his inmate; according to him, this ape was the most intelligent, the gentlest, the quietest and the least troublesome beast that he had

handled in his long career as an exhibitor of wild animals. By way of illustration he thrust his hand between the bars of the cage and was forthwith bitten by the ape in a mood of pleasantry. Naturally also he demanded an exorbitant price which Héraclius paid without any demur. Then, preceded by two porters, bending beneath the weight of the enormous cage the Doctor triumphantly made his way to his own domicile.

CHAPTER XI

WHERE IT IS DEMONSTRATED THAT HÉRACLIUS GLOSS WAS NOT EXEMPT FROM ALL THE WEAKNESSES OF THE STRONGER SEX

The nearer he approached his dwelling the slower grew his footsteps, for the problem he was debating inwardly was of a very different complexity from that of philosophic truth, and the unfortunate Doctor was thus formulating this problem to himself. "What subterfuge can I employ to smuggle beneath my roof this rough cast of a human so that my excellent Honorine will not observe the transaction?" Ah! the fact remained that this poor Héraclius who would fearlessly encounter the Dean's formidable shrugging of the shoulders and the scathing sarcasms of the Rector, was far from being equally brave when he had to deal with the outbreaks of his housekeeper Honorine. Why did even the Rector fear so greatly this little woman, still fresh and attractive, who seemed so devoted to her master's interests? You might as well ask why Hercules knitted at the feet of Omphale, or why Samson, as the Bible tells us, allowed Delilah to deprive him of his vigor and courage which were located in the locks of his hair.

Alas! on one occasion when the Doctor, by active walking exercise in the country lanes was trying to dissipate his sorrow at the betrayal of a great passion (for both the Dean and the Rector had their own reasons for being so highly tickled at the expense of Héraclius as they returned home one evening) he met at the corner of a hedge a young girl guarding her sheep. The learned man, who had not always sought exclusively for philosophic verity and who, in addition, had not as yet suspected the grand mystery of metempsychosis, instead of devoting his attention solely to the sheep, as he certainly would have done had he known, alas! that of which he was ignorant, started to converse with the maid who was tending them. Shortly after he engaged her as his housekeeper, it was the Doctor therefore who at a little later date became the sheep of this shepherdess, and it was whispered about that if, like her prototype of the Bible, this rustic Delilah had clipped the locks of this poor overconfiding old man, she had not, by so doing, deprived his forehead of all adornment.

Alas! That which he apprehended did

occur, and his fears were more than justified. Scarcely had she set her eyes on the inhabitant of the woods in his cage of iron netting, than Honorine gave vent to an outburst of most misplaced fury; after deluging her thoroughly scared master with a verbal showed of epithets of an unseemly description, her anger next fell upon the unexpected guest that had arrived. He no doubt, not having the same reasons as the Doctor for sharing the feelings of this uncouth housekeeper, started to whimper, to howl, to jabber and gnash his teeth at her, he clung to the bars of the cage with such violent rage, accompanied by such improper movements toward a female he had seen for the first time, that the latter was forced to retreat and, like a conquered warrior, retire to the seclusion of her kitchen.

In this way, master of the battlefield, and delighted at the unexpected assistance given him by his intelligent companion, Héraclius caused him to be brought into the study, where he installed the cage and its occupant beside his table at the corner of the fireplace.

CHAPTER XII

SHOWS HOW A DOCTOR AND A TAMER OF WILD ANIMALS ARE BY NO MEANS SYNONYMOUS

After this, there began a most significant interchange of glances between the two individuals who were now face to face. Every day, during a whole week, the Doctor spent long hours conversing, through the medium of the eyes, as he imagined, with the interesting specimen that he had procured. But that was not enough. What Héraclius desired was to make a study of the animal when at liberty, to glean his secrets, his wishes, his very thoughts, as it were; to allow the animal to come and go of his own volition and in the daily intimacy of their home life, see it resume the habits which had been forgotten, and, in this way, detect by unmistakable signs the recollection of a previous existence. To accomplish this, it was essential that his guest should have freedom of action and consequently that the cage be left unfastened. This enterprise, however, was by no means of a reassuring nature. The Doctor vainly brought the influence of magnetism to bear, likewise offerings of cakes and nuts, but each time that Héraclius approached somewhat too near the bars of the cage, the ape's manœuvres caused the Doctor considerable uneasiness. At last, one morning, no longer being able to resist the desire which was torturing him, he stepped briskly toward the cage turned the key in the padlock, threw the door wide open and, full of eagerness, retreated a few steps to watch the result, which followed in the briefest space of time.

The astonished ape hesitated a little, then with one bound sprang out of

the cage, then leaped on to the table from which, in a moment, he had scattered all the books and papers, then with a third leap he found himself in the arms of the Doctor upon whom he was showering boisterous evidences of his affection, so much so, that if Héraclius had not been wearing a wig, he would certainly have left what hair still remained to him between the claws of his formidable brother.

If the ape was nimble, the Doctor also was very agile; he sprang, first to the right, then to the left, slid, like an eel between the table, leaped over the armchairs as lightly as a greyhound, and still pursued by the animal, at length reached the door which he slammed behind him; then panting like a racer which is nearing the goal, he leaned against the wall to avoid a collapse to the ground.

During the remainder of the day, Héraclius Gloss was overwhelmed. He felt within himself as if all had crumbled away. What concerned him more immediately was the fact that he was in the dark as to the manner in which he and his unreflecting guest might exchange their relative positions. He dragged a chair up to the door which he dared not open, and took observations through the keyhole. Then, he saw, Oh Prodigy! . . . Oh unexpected good luck! . . . he saw the pleased conqueror stretched out in an armchair warming his feet at the fire.

In the first transports of joy the Doctor was about to enter the apartment, but upon further reflection he checked the impulse, and as if by a sudden inspiration, he concluded that hunger would doubtless bring about that which gentleness had failed to accomplish. On this occasion his reasoning was justified by the result. The famished ape capitulated. As this ape, on the whole, was not a bad ape, their reconciliation became complete, and from that day forward the Doctor and his guest lived together like two old friends.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW DOCTOR HÉRACLIUS GLOSS FOUND HIMSELF IN PRECISELY THE SAME POSITION AS THE GOOD KING HENRY IV, WHO AFTER LISTENING TO THE PLEADINGS OF TWO CONTENDING LAWYERS DECLARED THEY WERE BOTH RIGHT

Not long after this memorable day a heavy rain prevented the Doctor from making the usual morning tour of the garden. He betook himself early to his study, and from his armchair considered with a philosophical eye the antics of his ape which was squatting on a desk and pelting with balls of paper the dog Pythagoras lying stretched out at length on the hearth. The Doctor was studying the gradations of intelligence and its progressive ascent in these degraded human beings, and compared the relative degrees of keenness in the two

animals that were before him. In the case of the dog, he inferred it is instinct that yet prevails, while with the ape it is the reasoning faculty. The first follows the scent, listens, receives impressions through his marvelous organisms which constitute one half of his intellectual ability. The ape compares and calculates. At this point, the ape rendered impatient by the impassiveness and immobility of his enemy, which was lying peacefully with its head on its paws, satisfied to raise his eyes now and again in the direction of his persecutor far up out of his reach, decided to try a reconnoitering movement. The ape stole lightly from the desk, and crept gently and noiselessly in the direction of the dog, so noiselessly that not a sound was to be heard except the crackling of the embers in the fireplace and the tick-tack of the timepiece that resounded so loudly in the dense silence of the apartment. Then with an abrupt and unforeseen movement, he grasped the bushy tail of the unfortunate Pythagoras with his two forepaws. It happened that the dog, though motionless, and apparently unobservant, had followed every movement of the quadrumane; his tranquillity was but a trick to draw within his range the adversary hitherto safe from any counter attack; but just as Master Ape, rejoicing at the success of his trick, was grasping the caudal appendage of the dog, the latter sprang up, and with a single bound before the ape had time to escape, seized in the powerful jaw of the hunting dog that portion of his rival's anatomy, which in the case of sheep is euphemistically referred to as the "gigot." It is not known how the struggle might have ended if Héraclius had not interposed; but when peace was restored, and quite out of breath, he resumed his seat he pondered whether after all, on this occasion, his dog had not shown greater acuteness than the animal which is proverbially malignant beyond all others, and he remained plunged in the deepest perplexity.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW HÉRACLIUS WAS ON THE POINT OF FEASTING OFF A DISH OF ERSTWHILE BEAUTIES

As it was his breakfast hour, the Doctor turned into his dining room, sat down to table, adjusted his serviette and opened the precious manuscript, which was at his side. He was about to carry to his lips a savory little wing of a plump quail, when certain lines in the revered book attracted his notice and flamed more fearfully before his eyes than the three famous words inscribed on the wall of the banquet chamber of that celebrated monarch known as Belshazzar.

This is what the Doctor had noticed . . .

"Abstain then from all food that has enjoyed life, for to feed on animals is to feed on our fellow creatures, and

I hold him who is imbued with the profound truths of metempsychosis and still devours animals, which are but humans in inferior forms, equally guilty with the ferocious cannibal who feasts upon his slaughtered enemy."

And yet, upon the table, side by side, held together by a slender silver skewer, half a dozen quails fresh and plump were exhaling throughout the atmosphere their appetizing aroma.

It was a fearful struggle between the soul and the stomach, but it must be said to the credit of Héraclius that it was but a short struggle. The poor man, quite confounded, feared he could not long resist this terrible temptation. He rang for the housekeeper and, in a broken voice, ordered her to remove immediately the abominable dish and for the future to serve him but with eggs, milk and vegetables. Honorine almost fell over on hearing these amazing expressions; she attempted to expostulate, but confronted with her master's inflexible expression, she carried away the condemned victuals, consoled to a certain extent by the comfortable reflection that, in general, what is one man's loss is the gain of another.

Quail! Quail! What could quail have been in a former existence the wretched Héraclius asked of himself as he sadly ate a splendid cauliflower with cream sauce, which, on this particular occasion however, appeared to him as most unpalatable.

What human beings could have been sufficiently elegant and delicate and refined enough to transmigrate into the bodies of these exquisite little creatures, so coquettish and so dainty? Ah! it must have been the adorable little court ladies of the last centuries, and the Doctor blenched as he reflected that for over thirty years he had devoured every morning at breakfast a half dozen of the beauties of bygone days.

CHAPTER XV

OF THE MANNER IN WHICH THE RECTOR INTERPRETED THE LORD'S COMMANDMENT

In the evening of that unhappy day, the Dean and the Rector came to pass an hour or two in conversation with Héraclius in his study; the Doctor lost no time in explaining the embarrassment in which he had found himself and demonstrated to them how quail and other animal food was now, as much forbidden to him as ham would be in the case of an orthodox Jew.

The Dean, who had probably fared poorly at dinner, upon hearing this, did not attempt to restrain his displeasure and cursed so vehemently that the unfortunate Doctor, who respected him greatly, though lamenting his lack of vision, was at a loss how to escape his wrath. As for the Rector, he entirely commended the scruples of Héraclius, even suggesting to him that a disciple of Pythagoras, feeding on animal flesh, might run the risk of partaking of a

mushroom cutlet formerly a portion of his own father, or of a dish of truffles served up with some member of his grandfather's anatomy, which would be in opposition to the spirit of every religion; to strengthen his assertion he quoted the fourth Commandment of the God of the Christians:

"Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long, etc."

"It is true," he added, "that I who am not a believer in your theories, sooner than allow myself to perish of hunger, would slightly alter the divine precept or even substitute the following:

"Devour your father and mother so that your days may be long, etc."

CHAPTER XVI

HOW THE FORTY-SECOND READING OF THE MANUSCRIPT BROUGHT NEW LIGHT INTO THE MIND OF THE DOCTOR

Just as a rich man is enabled every day to extract fresh pleasures and new enjoyments by means of his wealth, similarly Doctor Héraclius, the owner of the priceless manuscript, made surprising discoveries upon every successive reading.

One evening as he was completing the forty-second perusal of his document, a sudden illumination shot through his brain like a flash of lightning.

As we have seen before, the Doctor could calculate very closely the period at which a man who had disappeared, would have completed his transmigrations and would reappear in his original form. It was thus that he was stricken with consternation at the thought that the author of the manuscript might have recovered his position in the ranks of humanity.

Hereupon, as feverishly as an alchemist who believes he is on the eve of discovering the Philosopher's Stone, he made the closest calculations to substantiate the probability of his theory, and after many hours of refractory labor and elaborate combinations, he arrived at the conclusion that this man should, at that present moment, be a contemporary of his or, at least, be about to reappear in human form. As, however, he did not own any document which could fix the exact date of the death of this great metempsychosist, he could not determine with certainty the time of his reincarnation.

No sooner had he sensed the possibility of rediscovering this being, who was for him more than a man, more than a philosopher, even more than a God, than he experienced one of those profound emotions, such as arise when we hear that a father who was believed to have been dead for many years is living, and in the near vicinity. A pious hermit of the desert who has passed his days, nourished on the love and recollection of Christ, to whom it had been suddenly announced that his Lord was about to appear to him, would not have

been more overcome than was Doctor Héraclius Gloss once he felt convinced that he might, one day, meet the author of the manuscript.

CHAPTER XVII

THE STEPS TAKEN BY DOCTOR HÉRACLIUS GLOSS TO DISCOVER THE AUTHOR OF THE MANUSCRIPT

A few days later the readers of the "Star of Balançon" noticed with astonishment on the fourth page of that newspaper the following advertisement:

"Pythagoras—Rome in the year 184 —Inscription" found on the pedestal of Jupiter — Philosopher — Architect — Laborer—Monk—Mathematician—Poet —Sailor—Reflect and Remember—The story of your life is in my hands.—Address—H. G., Post Office, Balançon."

The Doctor had no doubt, but that if the man whom he so ardently longed to see should read this advertisement, unintelligible to any one else, he would grasp its hidden meaning and make himself known to him. Then each day before sitting down to the table he enquired at the Post Office if there were any letters addressed to H. G., and when he opened the door above which was inscribed, "Post Office, General Delivery, Enquired Subscriptions" he was certainly more deeply affected than any lover about to open a letter from the woman he adores.

Alas! the days followed each other with disheartening monotony. Each morning the Post Office clerk returned the same answer to the Doctor's question, and each morning he returned home sadder and more discouraged. But the folks of Balançon being like all other people throughout the world, intriguing, indiscreet, scandalmongers and greedy of gossip, soon enough connected the strange advertisement in the "Star" with the Doctor's daily visits to the Post Office. Then the question arose among them, what mystery might not be concealed beneath this? and they began to talk.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH THE DOCTOR RECOGNIZES WITH STUPEFACTION THE AUTHOR OF THE MANUSCRIPT

On one occasion when the Doctor was unable to sleep, he rose between one and two of the morning with the intention of reading over a passage in the manuscript the meaning of which had seemed doubtful to him. In his

carpet slippers he opened as gently as it was possible the door of his bedroom so as not to disturb the slumber of all the series of semi-humans who were undergoing expiation beneath his roof; but whatever may have been the previous conditions of existence of these fortunate creatures, it is certain that they never had enjoyed such perfect tranquillity and happiness; for in this hospitable abode they found good fare, pleasant living quarters and all the rest, so full of sympathy for their needs was the heart of this excellent man; he arrived, still without creating the slightest noise, as far as the door of his study and entered within. Ah! Héraclius was brave, beyond question, he feared neither ghosts nor apparitions, but however intrepid a man may be, there are motions of fright that will riddle, as with bullets, the armor of the most dauntless courage, and the Doctor remained standing, livid with terror, with haggard eyes, his hair on end, his teeth chattering and shaken from head to foot, trembling violently at the incomprehensible scene he now beheld.

The study lamp was lighted on the table, and seated by the fire, with his back to the door by which Héraclius had entered, the Doctor saw . . . the real Doctor Héraclius attentively reading his manuscript. There could be no doubt about it. . . . It was certainly he himself. . . . Thrown over his shoulders was the long dressing gown of old silk with a pattern of large red flowers, and upon his head was the Greek cap of black velvet with gold embroidery. The Doctor felt that if his other self were to turn round, that if both the Héracliuses were to meet each other's gaze, the one who was now quaking with fear would drop as if struck by a thunderbolt at the sight of his second self, but at that very moment, seized by a nervous spasm, his unclasped fingers allowed the candlestick he was holding to fall and roll noisily on the floor . . . the loud clatter gave him a violent start . . . the other one turned round abruptly, and the scared Doctor recognized . . . his ape. For a few moments his thoughts chased through his brain like withered leaves swept by the gale; then all at once he was carried away by a sentiment of the most intense joy that he had ever experienced, for he now realized that the author so earnestly expected and looked for, as the Jews look for a Messiah, was now there before him. It was his ape. Almost crazed with joy he sprang toward him, and seizing the venerated creature in his arms, embraced it with frenzy. Never was a cherished mistress more passionately embraced by a lover. Then, seated opposite him, on the other side of the fireplace, he contemplated him till morning.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW THE DOCTOR FOUND HIMSELF PLACED IN A MOST AWKWARD DILEMMA

Just as the most beautiful summer days are sometimes suddenly disturbed by a fearful storm, so the Doctor's happiness was suddenly interrupted by the most frightful suggestion possible. He had, indeed, found what he was seeking, but, alas! it was only an ape. They most undoubtedly understood each other, but they could not exchange conversation from which he had hoped to derive so much profit.

Farewell! that splendid crusade against superstition which they were going to undertake together. For, of himself alone, the Doctor did not possess sufficient weapons with which to overthrow the hydra of ignorance. He required a man, an apostle, a confessor, a martyr, a rôle which this ape, alas! was incapable of filling. What should he do? A terrible voice shouted in his ear: "Kill him!"

Héraclius shuddered. In a second, he imagined that if he killed him, his freed soul would at once enter the body of an infant just prior to its birth, that at least twenty years would be required for it to attain its maturity. The Doctor would then be seventy years old. However, that might be possible. But then would he ever come across this man? also his religion forbade his killing any living being, as that would be assassination; and his own soul, the soul of Héraclius, would pass after death into the body of a savage beast, as happens to murderers. What matter? He would be a victim to science —and to his belief. He seized a large scimitar from among some wall trophies and was about to strike, like Abraham on the mountain, when a thought stayed his arm. If the expiation of this man was not completed, and instead of entering into the body of a child, his soul should pass for the second time into the body of an ape? This was possible, even probable, almost certain.

In thus committing a useless crime the Doctor condemned himself to a terrible punishment, without any benefit to his fellow creatures. These constant emotions had exhausted him and he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XX

WHERE THE DOCTOR HOLDS A BRIEF CONVERSATION WITH THE HOUSEKEEPER

When Héraclius regained consciousness, the housekeeper Honorine was bathing his temples in vinegar. It was seven in the morning. The first thought of the Doctor was for his ape. The creature had disappeared.

"My ape, where is my ape?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, indeed, talk about the ape!" retorted the half-servant, half-mistress, always disposed to ill humor. A beautiful creature upon my word! It mimics everything that it sees you do. Did I not find it the other day putting on your shoes? Then again, this very morning when I had to pick you up where you are, and the Lord knows what diabolical ideas have been running through your head for some time, hindering you from resting quietly in your bed, did I not see this evil beast, a devil rather under the outward form of an ape, wearing your cap and dressing gown? He seemed to me also to be grinning when he looked at you as if it was quite amusing to see a man in a faint. And when I came near it, this atrocious beast threw himself upon me as if to devour me; but thank the Lord, I am not timid and still have a good wrist; I took up the poker and caught him a few smart blows on that villainous back of his, and he ran off to your room where he is no doubt busy with some new trick of his.

"What! you struck my ape!" shouted the exasperated Doctor; "let me tell you this much that, for the future, he is to be respected and waited upon as the master of this house. Those are my wishes."

"Oh, that's good! for not only is he the master of the house—but for quite a long time he has been the master of the master"—muttered Honorine as she withdrew to the kitchen satisfied that Doctor Héraclius Gloss was completely insane.

CHAPTER XXI

WHERE IT IS SHOWN THAT ONE TENDERLY LOVED FRIEND IS SUFFICIENT TO LIGHTEN THE BURDEN OF THE GREATEST SORROWS

Matters developed as the Doctor had wished; from that day, the ape became in reality the master of the house, and Héraclius the valet of this noble animal. He contemplated the ape for hours with infinite tenderness, he had for it all the delicate little attentions of a lover. On every occasion he would lavish upon him an entire dictionary of tender expressions, gently pressing his paw as he would the hand of some dear friend; meanwhile gazing earnestly at the brute while he talked—also explaining certain points in his remarks, which he thought might seem obscure to the animal and filling the life of the latter with the most attentive kindness and the most solicitous care.

And the ape fully concurred, calm as a God receiving the homage of his worshippers.

Like all great minds which exist in solitude because their elevation raises them above the common level of popular stupidity, Héraclius had, until now,

felt all alone; alone in his labors, alone in his works, alone in his struggles and his reverses, and finally, alone in his discovery and his triumph.

He had not so far converted the multitude to his doctrines. He had not even convinced his two most intimate friends, the Dean and the Rector; but from the day upon which he had discerned in the ape the grand philosopher of whom he had so often dreamed, from that day, the Doctor no longer felt isolated.

As he was convinced that an animal is deprived of speech only as a punishment for past offenses, and that as a consequence of the same punishment it must be filled with recollections of previous stages of existence, Héraclius developed an ardent affection for his companion and this affection consoled him for all the sorrows that had just befallen him.

For some time past existence had become grayer for the Doctor. The Dean and the Rector now visited him much less frequently, and that created a void around him. They had ceased dining with him each Sunday since he had forbidden at his table all food which had enjoyed animal life. This change of regimen was also a great deprivation for the Doctor, assuming at times the proportions of a genuine affliction. He who formerly was accustomed to expect impatiently the so pleasant breakfast hour, now almost dreaded it. He would enter the dining-room sadly, knowing well there was nothing agreeable to be looked for in it any longer, and the memory of the toasted quail haunted him ceaselessly as with a sentiment of remorse.

Alas! it was not so much remorse at having devoured so many, but rather the feeling of despair at being compelled to renounce them for ever.

CHAPTER XXII

WHERE THE DOCTOR MAKES THE DISCOVERY THAT HIS APE BEARS A CLOSER RESEMBLANCE TO HIM THAN HE IMAGINED

Doctor Héraclius was awakened one morning by an unusual sound; he sprang out of bed and dressing himself hurriedly, made his way to the kitchen where he heard the strangest cries and lamentations. The perfidious Honorine had for a considerable time been turning over in her mind the darkest projects of revenge upon the intruder who had robbed her of her master's affection. Knowing the tastes and appetites of the animals, she had succeeded somehow to fasten the poor ape by means of a cord to a leg of the kitchen table, and once she was assured that he was securely tied to it, she returned to the other end of the kitchen and amused herself by displaying before his eyes the dainties most calculated to excite his appetite. She compelled him to undergo the fearful tortures of Tantalus that should be inflicted in the

lower regions upon those only who have sinned egregiously, and the mischievous housekeeper shook with merriment as she devised ingenious torments of which only a woman can be capable.

The man-ape turned and twisted about in fury at the sight of the appetizing dish that was held up to him from a distance, and his rage at finding himself bound to the legs of the massive table, caused him to grimace most horribly, to the redoubled gratification of the temptress who was the cause of this torture.

However, at the moment that the Doctor, a jealous master, appeared on the scene, the victim of this atrocious snare, succeeded by a prodigious effort to snap the rope which was holding him back, and if it had not been for the violent interposition of the incensed Héraclius, the Lord only knows on what dainties this new four-handed Tantalus might not have satiated his appetite.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW THE DOCTOR DISCOVERED THAT HIS APE HAD UNWORTHILY DECEIVED HIM

This time anger had the upper hand of respect, and the Doctor, seizing by the throat the ape-philosopher, dragged him away howling, into his study, and administered the worst chastisement that had ever been inflicted on the back of a metempsychosist.

As soon as the wearied arm of Héraclius loosened somewhat its hold on the neck of the poor brute, guilty only of tastes too similar to those of his superior brother, the ape disengaged itself from the grasp of the outraged master of the house, jumped upon the table, snatched the large snuff box of the Doctor which was lying on a book, and hurled it wide open at the head of its owner. The latter had only time to close his eyes in order to avoid the cloud of snuff which would certainly have blinded him; but as soon as he reopened them the culprit had disappeared bearing away the manuscript of which he was the supposed author.

The consternation of Héraclius knew no bounds—and he darted like a madman on the tracks of the fugitive, prepared for any sacrifice in order to recover the precious parchment. He searched the house from cellar to attic, opened all the closets and looked beneath all the furniture. His search remained absolutely fruitless. At length being at a loss what to do, he sat down beneath a tree in the garden. It had seemed to him from time to time as if some light object was striking him gently on the top of the head, and supposed it might be dead leaves shaken loose by the wind, when he noticed a ball of paper rolling down the path in front of him. He picked it up and undid it. Heavens! it was one of the pages of his manuscript. Terrified, he raised his head, and perceived the abominable animal deliberately preparing some

fresh projectiles of the same order, and while so engaged, the monster indulged in so fearful a grin of satisfaction that Satan himself could not have grinned more horribly when he saw Adam take the fatal apple which, from the time of Eve to that of Honorine, women have never ceased to offer man. When he saw this a dreadful vision shot through the brain of the Doctor and he realized that he had been fooled, deceived, and mystified in the most abominable manner by this hairy cheat, who was not any more the long sought author than was the Pope or the Grand Turk. The precious work would have entirely disappeared if Héraclius had not noticed close at hand a garden hose such as is used to sprinkle water on the more distant flower beds. He seized it rapidly and with almost superhuman vigor, bestowed upon the traitor such an unexpected shower bath that the latter fled leaping from bough to bough uttering shrill cries, and suddenly by a clever ruse and doubtless to gain a little time, flung the mutilated manuscript full in the face of his adversary; then briskly changing his position ran off in the direction of the house.

Before the manuscript had touched the Doctor, he had fallen flat on his back with arms and feet extended, suffocating with indignation. When he regained his feet he no longer had the strength to avenge this new outrage; he returned painfully to his study and discovered that only three pages were missing, which was a slight relief to his feelings.

CHAPTER XXIV

EUREKA

The visit of the Dean and the Rector aroused him from his torpor. The three conversed for an hour, making no allusion to metempsychosis; but just as his two friends were on the point of departure, Héraclius could restrain himself no longer. While the Dean was putting on his heavy bearskin coat, he drew the Rector to one side, for, of the two friends, he stood less in awe of the Rector, and related his whole misfortune to him. He told him how he imagined he had discovered the author of the manuscript; how he had deceived himself, and how this wretched ape had made a shameless mockery of him, and how he now saw himself abandoned and in despair; at the thought of the crash of his illusions Héraclius gave way to tears. The Rector, deeply moved, took his hands; he was about to say something when the deep voice of the Dean exclaiming, "Oh, Rector! are you not coming?" was heard in the vestibule below. Then the Rector, giving the unfortunate Doctor a final grasp of the hand and smiling gently, as one does when attempting to console a troublesome child, said to him:

"There, there, let us see; calm yourself, my dear friend, who knows? you yourself possibly are the author of this

manuscript." He then dropped out of sight in the dark shadow of the street, leaving Héraclius at his door in a state of bewilderment.

The Doctor returned slowly to his study, murmuring to himself at intervals, "Maybe after all, I am the author of the manuscript." He read over again, very carefully, the manner in which this document had been discovered at every reappearance of its author; then he recalled how he himself had discovered it. He remembered the dream that had preceded that happy day, like a warning of Providence, and his sensations when he entered the alley of the Old Pigeons. It all came back to him, forcibly, clear and distinct.

He then stood up erect, stretched out his arm like some ectstatic votary and proclaimed in a resounding voice: "It is I, it is I myself!" A shiver ran through the whole building. Pythagoras barked excitedly, the other disturbed animals woke up suddenly and showed signs of commotion, as if each, in his own language, was eager to celebrate the glorious resurrection of the Prophet of metempsychosis. Then, under the influence of an almost superhuman enthusiasm, Héraclius seated himself. He opened the new Bible at the last occupied page, and from that point started to write down, with religious precision, the whole successive story of his life.

CHAPTER XXV

I AM WHAT I AM

From that day on, Héraclius Gloss became imbued with a colossal pride. Like the Messiah proceeding from God the Father, he proceeded directly from Pythagoras, or rather, he himself was Pythagoras having once lived in the form of that philosopher.

In this manner, therefore, his own genealogy far surpassed the scutcheoned quarterings of the most feudal families. He looked down with haughty disdain upon all the great men of humanity; their greatest accomplishments appeared insignificant to him beside his own, and he isolated himself, in a sublime elevation, in a region of worlds and of beasts. He was the personification of metempsychosis and his house was its temple.

He had forbidden his housekeeper and the gardener to destroy creatures usually considered vermin. The caterpillars and slugs swarmed in his garden and former mortals, now in the shape of large hairy spiders, displayed their hideous transformation on the wall of his study; this led that obnoxious Rector to observe dryly that if all the exparasites, appropriately metamorphosed, were to assemble together on the head of the too sensitive Doctor he would on no account dislodge the unfortunate degraded beings.

There was one thing alone, however, which troubled the mind of Héraclius in his lofty expansiveness; this was the

manner in which the animals ceaselessly preyed upon each other; the spiders lying in ambush for the flies on the wing, the birds bearing away the spiders, the cats preying upon the birds, and his dog Pythagoras taking delight in strangling any cat that came within the reach of his jaws.

From morning till night he followed the slow and progressive evolution of metempsychosis along each step of the animal ladder; he gleamed sudden revelations as he watched the sparrows pecking in the gutter; it moved him deeply to watch the ants, those untiring and industrious workers; in them he imagined he could detect the idlers and good-for-nothings of former days who in expiation of their ancient indolence, were now condemned to this persistent labor. He passed hours lying on the grass watching the insects, and was impressed with the depth of his own penetration.

Like unto Nebuchadnezzar he went on all fours, he would roll in the dust with his dog, he lived with his animals, he wallowed with them. For him, man was gradually being eliminated from his world, and before long he could discern in it but animals.

When he contemplated the beasts, he felt that he was indeed a brother to them; he talked to them only, and when by chance he found himself obliged to speak to human beings, a dumbness struck him, as if he were among a strange folk, and at a loss to express himself, and was inwardly provoked at the stupidity of his own kind.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHAT THEY WERE SAYING AT THE COUNTER OF MADAME LABOTTE, DEALER IN FRUIT, OF NO. 26 MARAICHERIE STREET

Mademoiselle Victorine; who was chef de cuisine to the Dean of the Faculty of Balançon, Mademoiselle Gertrude, housekeeper for the Dean of the said Faculty, and Mademoiselle Anastasie, housekeeper for the Abbé Beaufleury, who was the Parish-priest of St. Eulalie, such was the respectable circle which had assembled one Thursday morning, at the store counter of Madame Labotte, fruit dealer, of No. 26 Maraicherie Street.

These damsels, bearing their market baskets on the left arm, wearing snow white caps rakishly perched on their hair, and adorned with lace trimmings and pipings, with streamers hanging down their backs, were listening with much interest to the narrative of Mademoiselle Anastasie, who was relating to them in what manner the Abbé Beaufleury, the previous evening, had exorcised a poor woman who was possessed of five devils.

At that moment, Honorine, the housekeeper of Doctor Héraclius, came in like a gust of wind; she dropped into a chair, unable to restrain her pent-up

feelings, and when she perceived that their interest had been sufficiently aroused, she thus broke out:

"No! this is altogether too much! you may say what you like, but I shall stay no longer in that house."

Then, covering her face with her hands, she commenced to sob; in a minute or two, having somewhat calmed down, she resumed:

"After all, it is not his fault; the poor man, if he is a lunatic."

"Who is a lunatic?" enquired Madame Labotte.

"Her master, Doctor Héraclius," answered Mademoiselle Victorine, who, turning to Honorine said to her:

"What the Dean was saying the other day is quite true then, that your master has gone out of his mind?"

"Yes, indeed," chimed in Mademoiselle Anastasie: "the curé was saying a day or two ago to the Abbé Rosencroix that Doctor Héraclius was a veritable reprobate; that he worshipped animals after the fashion of a certain Mr. Pythagoras, who, it seems, was as vile an unbeliever as Luther.

"What has happened?" enquired Mademoiselle Gertrude, "what has happened to you now?"

"Can you imagine," resumed Honorine, wiping her tears in the corner of her apron, that for about six months my poor master has gone crazy about animals; he believes he was created and placed in the world to wait on them, he talks to them just as he would to rational beings, and one would think that he heard some voice within them which answers him. Well, last evening, as I had found that mice had been nibbling at my provisions, I had placed a trap in the buffet. This morning I discovered a mouse in the trap, I called the cat and was about to give it this vermin, when my master came in, like one demented, he snatched the mouse-trap from my hands and turned the creature loose again among my preserves; and as I was losing my temper, he turned on me savagely and began talking to me worse than you would talk to a ragpicker."

There was complete silence for a few seconds, after which Honorine continued:

"After all, I bear the poor man no ill will, he is crazy!"

Two hours later, the story of the Doctor's mouse had gone the rounds of the Balançon kitchens. At noon it was the latest news at the breakfast tables of the burgesses of that town. At eight o'clock the Mayor, while sipping his coffee, was relating it to six magistrates who had dined with him, and these gentlemen in various and grave attitudes were listening to him musingly, nodding occasionally and without a smile. At eleven the Prefect of the Department, who was holding a reception, was endeavouring to sift the story, surrounded by six petty officials, when his eye fell upon the Rector who was moving round with his white tie and spiteful pleasantries from one group to another; he asked the Rector for his opinion:

"What does it prove after all?" said the Rector. "If La Fontaine was still alive he could write a new fable entitled, 'The Philosopher's Mouse,' ending somewhat like this:

"The duller fool of the two is not
the one you would suppose."

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW DOCTOR HÉRACLIUS REASONED DIFFERENTLY FROM THE DAUPHIN OF FRANCE, WHO AFTER HAVING FISHED A MONKEY OUT OF THE WATER THREW IT BACK AND WENT IN SEARCH OF SOME ONE TO COME AND SAVE IT

When Héraclius went out the next morning, he observed that everybody, as he passed by, watched him with curiosity and that people were even turning back to look at him. The attention of which he was the object astonished him at first; he sought the reason for it, and concluded that his doctrines had gained ground, unknown to him, and that he was on the eve of being understood by his fellow citizens. Then a feeling of affection sprang up in him suddenly for these townsmen of his, in whom he already foresaw enthusiastic disciples, and he smilingly bowed to them from right to left, as a prince might do among his people. The chucklings which followed him appeared to his ears to be a murmur of applause and he beamed with delight as he thought of the coming confusion of the Rector and the Dean.

He arrived thus at the quays on the banks of the River Brille. A few yards away, a group of children were in a state of noisy excitement, shouting with laughter and throwing stones in the water, while some sailors smoking their pipes in the sunshine appeared to be following the movements of the urchins. Héraclius drew near; then suddenly recoiled like a man who receives a violent blow in the chest.

About ten yards from the bank, alternately sinking and rising to the surface, a kitten was to be seen, struggling in the water; the unfortunate little creature was making desperate efforts to reach the shore, but each time that it showed its head above the surface, a stone flung by one of the young hoodlums, who were enjoying its sufferings, caused it to disappear once more. These villainous brats vied with each other in this exercise of skill, and urged one another on, and when a well-aimed shot would reach its mark, then along the quay there burst forth an explosion of laughter and hilarious joy; a sharp pebble now struck the cat in the centre of the forehead and a thin streak of blood showed against the white fur; among the tormentors a delirium of applause and howlings ensued, but it was soon changed into a wild scramble for escape. Ghastly, shaking with anger, upsetting everything in his way, and striking out with both feet and fists, the Doctor had thrown himself into the midst of this gathering, as a wolf might spring among a flock of sheep. The panic was so great and the flight so instantaneous that one of the children in his terror threw himself in the water and was carried away. Héraclius quickly unbuttoned his frock coat, removed his shoes and plunged into the water. He was seen to swim vigorously for a few seconds, seize the kitten, just as it was sinking and then swim back exultingly to the bank. He seated himself upon a capstan, and after drying the kitten, he

kissed and caressed the little being he had rescued so lately from the jaws of death, and holding it affectionately in his arms, as he would his own child, without giving a thought to the small boy that two sailors were now bringing back to the shore, and not heeding the tumult that was rising behind him, he strode rapidly toward his house, forgetting his coat and shoes on the quay.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MAN WHO SAVES THE LIFE OF A CAT, IN PREFERENCE TO THAT OF A FELLOW CREATURE, HAD BETTER BE ON HIS GUARD AGAINST THE PUBLIC INDIGNATION. JUST AS ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME, SO DOES METEMPSYCHOSIS LEAD TO THE LUNATIC ASYLUM ("STAR OF BALANÇON")

Two hours later a crowd of people shouting tumultuously gathered before the windows of Doctor Héraclius Gloss, soon a shower of stones smashed some of the panes, and the mob was about to force open the door when the local police made its appearance at the end of the street. The excitement abated by degrees; the crowd melted away finally; but two of the police were detailed for stationary duty in front of the Doctor's house until morning. He passed the evening in a condition of extraordinary agitation. He accounted for the upheaval by some underhand work of the clergy aimed at him, and by the explosion of hatred which the advent of a new creed always provokes among the followers of a more ancient faith. He felt himself a martyr and was prepared to declare his faith before the executioner. He brought into his study all the animals the apartment could contain, and at sunrise he might have been seen sleeping along with a goat, a sheep and his dog, and pressing to his heart the kitten, the life of which he had saved.

A loud knock at the door awoke him and Honorine ushered in a very grave individual, who was followed by two detectives. A little in the rear, the physician of the Prefecture was standing, somewhat in the background. The grave individual made himself known as the Commissary of Police and politely invited Héraclius to follow him; he obeyed, under stress of great emotion; a carriage was waiting at the door, he was made to enter it, then seated beside the Commissary with the physician and one of the detectives facing him, the other detective taking a seat next to the driver, Héraclius observed that they were following the Street of the Jews, the Square of the Hôtel de Ville, and the Boulevard of the Pucelle, and finally were drawing up before a very large building of a gloomy aspect over the portals of which these words were inscribed: "Lunatic Asylum."

Héraclius immediately realized the dreadful trap into which he had fallen; he understood the fearful cunning of

his enemies and with all his strength endeavoured to fling himself into the street; then a terrible struggle took place between him and the three men who had him in their custody. He struggled violently, twisted about, struck out, and even attempted to bite them; he yelled with rage until he felt himself overpowered, firmly bound, and carried into the dismal building, the great door of which closed behind him with a dismal clang.

He was then placed in a narrow cell of a singular aspect. The chimney, the window and the mirror all being protected by heavy gratings; the bed and the only chair were held to the floor by iron chains; there was no piece of furniture in the cell that could be raised or moved from one spot to another by the occupant. The event proved that these precautions were not unnecessary. No sooner did the Doctor find himself in this dwelling, so new to him, than he gave way to paroxysms of rage which were choking him. He tried to smash the furniture, tear away the gratings, and break the window pains, finding he could not succeed he rolled on the floor, shrieking so fearfully, that two attendants in blouses, wearing a kind of uniform cap entered abruptly into the cell followed by a bald individual garbed entirely in black. Upon a signal from this personage, the other two men threw themselves upon Héraclius, and placed him in a straitjacket; then they looked in the direction of the personage in black. He contemplated the Doctor for a minute, and turning toward his acolytes, uttered the words:

"To the shower bath."

Héraclius was then carried into a large and chilly chamber, in the center of which was an empty bath. They stripped him, still yelling, and laid him in the bath, and before he was able to realize just what was happening, he was absolutely choked by the most horrible douche of icy water that had ever fallen on mortal shoulders, even in the remotest Arctic regions. Héraclius discontinued his struggles forthwith. The man in black was still watching him attentively; he felt the Doctor's pulse gravely and said:

"One more."

A second shower fell from the ceiling and the Doctor lay prostrate, shivering, choking and more than half suffocated in the icy bath. He was then lifted out, wrapped up in warm blankets, and laid on his cot where for thirty-five hours he was sunk in a profound slumber.

He awoke next day with a steady pulse and a clearer head; he reflected a few moments upon his present situation, then he commenced to read his manuscript which he had taken care to bring along with him. The man in black soon appeared. A table, with a meal laid out, was brought in and they ate breakfast together. The Doctor who had not forgotten his bath of the previous day behaved very quietly, and with much politeness, without saying one word on the matter which had led to his misadventure; he spoke for a long time in a most interesting manner and tried to convince his host that his brain was as clear as that of the seven wise men of Greece.

The individual in black, upon leaving, invited Héraclius to accompany him for a walk around the garden of the institution. This was in reality a large yard, planted with trees; about fifty persons were walking around, some of

them laughing, others declaiming, others were serious or melancholy.

The Doctor first remarked among them a man of lofty stature, white haired and wearing a long beard who was walking alone with his head bent forward. Without knowing exactly why, he felt interested in the lot of this individual; at the same moment the unknown raised his head and gazed intently at Héraclius. After that they drew nearer and politely exchanged salutations.

A conversation then began. The Doctor now learned that his new acquaintance was Dagobert Félorme and that he was a professor of modern languages at the College of Balançon. Héraclius was unable to observe any signs of derangement in this man's brain and he asked himself what could have brought such a man into such a place, when the other, stopping suddenly, took the Doctor's hand and squeezing it tightly, asked him in a low voice,

"Do you believe in metempsychosis?"

The Doctor reeled, and stammered something; their eyes met, and for some seconds, both of them remained standing, gazing at each other. At last Héraclius gave vent to his feelings; tears sprang to his eyes, they fell into each other's arms. An exchange of confidences commenced and they very soon discovered that the same light had illumined them, that their minds were impregnated with the same doctrine. There was no point on which their ideas were not in accord, but the more the Doctor perceived this astounding similarity of thoughts the more he experienced a growing uneasiness; it seemed to him that the higher the stranger rose in his estimation, the more his own self-esteem decreased.

Jealousy stung him to the heart.

Félorme suddenly exclaimed:

"I am Metempsychosis; I, it was, who discovered the laws of the evolutions of the soul; it is I who fathomed the destinies of men. It is I who was Pythagoras. . . ."

Here, Héraclius drew himself up whiter than a shroud.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I am Pythagoras!"

Once again they gazed at each other steadily; Félorme continued:

"I have been, in succession, a philosopher, an architect, a soldier, laborer, monk, mathematician, doctor, poet and sailor."

"I also," said Héraclius.

"I have written the history of my life in Latin, Greek, German, Italian, Spanish and French," declared the new acquaintance with emphasis.

"So have I," retorted Héraclius.

They both ceased speaking and their glances might have been compared to the points of crossed swords.

"In the year 184," thundered Félorme, "I lived in Rome and was a philosopher."

Then the Doctor, more tremulous than a leaf shaken in a gale of wind, drew the precious document from his pocket and brandished it like a weapon under the nose of his adversary.

Félorme bounded backward.

"My manuscript," he shouted and extended his arm to seize it.

"It is my manuscript," roared Héraclius, and with surprising swiftness he raised the object in dispute above his head, passing it behind his back, from one hand to another, and causing it to undergo a thousand evolutions, one

stranger than the other to keep it from his rival's unrelenting pursuit.

Félorme gnashed his teeth, stamped his foot and shouted out:

"Thief! Thief! Thief!"

At length he did succeed by a movement as rapid as it was adroit in seizing one end of the manuscript which Héraclius was trying to withhold from him. For a few moments each of them tugged on his side with equal anger and energy, but as neither of them would yield, the manuscript itself (which held the two men together by a species of physical link) terminated the struggle between them as sagely as the late King Solomon might have done, by separating of its own accord into two equal portions, thus allowing the two contestants to hastily seat themselves ten paces apart, each still holding on to his respective half of the victory, between clenched fists.

They remained seated, but once more began to study each other, as might two rival powers which, after having measured their strength, are in hesitation prior to the inception of fresh hostilities.

Dagobert Félorme was the first to open the attack. "The proof that I am the author of the manuscript," he said, "is that I knew it before you."

Héraclius made no reply.

"The proof that I am the author of the manuscript," continued Félorme, "is that I can repeat it from one end to the other in the seven languages which have been employed in composing it."

Héraclius did not answer; he was meditating deeply. A revolution was taking place within him. There was no longer any doubt; the victory was with his rival. But this very author whom he had so earnestly invoked now incensed him as would a false God; inasmuch as he, Héraclius, was now a dethroned divinity, he rebelled against the real God. As long as he did not believe himself to have been the author of the manuscript, he had vehemently longed to discover the true author; but from the day when he had said to himself "It is I who have done this, I am metempsychosis" he felt he could not bring himself to surrender his position to another. Like those who would burn down their house sooner than see it occupied by others, from the moment when an unknown was standing on the altar which he had raised to himself, from that moment he burned both the temple and the God; he was prepared to burn metempsychosis itself; so, after a prolonged silence, and in a deliberate and solemn tone, he uttered these words:

"You are a madman."

For over a month the Doctor did not leave his cell, he passed his days alone, with his head buried between his hands, in the deepest abstraction.

The Dean and the Rector came to visit him from time to time, and very gradually, by means of subtle comparisons and delicate allusions, fostered the revival that was working in his brain. They let him know also, that a certain Félorme, a professor of languages in the College of Balançon, had lost his reason while composing a philosophic treatise upon the doctrines of Pythagoras, Aristotle and Plato; a treatise which he claimed he had begun in the reign of the Emperor Commodus.

At length, on a bright and sunny morning, the Doctor, himself once more, the Héraclius of happy days, shook

hands warmly with his two friends and informed them that he had renounced metempsychosis for ever, his former creed of expiations in animal form, and transmigration of the soul and that he smote his breast in recognition of his error.

Eight days later he left the asylum.

CHAPTER XXIX

HOW ONE MAY FALL SOMETIMES FROM CHARYBDIS INTO SCYLLA

As he was leaving the fatal building the Doctor hesitated a moment on the threshold, inhaling the invigorating breath of freedom, and then with the jaunty step of former days he turned in the direction of his own home. He had been walking for five minutes, when a small boy who had recognized him, gave a prolonged whistle which was answered by a similar one from a nearby street. Another urchin came running to the spot, and the first of the two pointing out Héraclius to his companion, shouted out:

"There goes the animal man who has been let out of the lunatic asylum."

And both of them, falling in line behind the Doctor, commenced to mimic with remarkable talent the cries of all the animals. A dozen other little wretches had soon joined the first two and formed an escort for the ex-metempsychosist as noisy as it was harrowing. One of them marched about ten yards ahead of the Doctor, carrying in lieu of a flag a broom at the end of which he fastened the skin of a rabbit, picked up no doubt at some corner, three others followed immediately behind, imitating the beatings of the drum, then came the perturbed Doctor enwrapped in his long coat and with his hat well pressed down over his forehead, creating the impression of a general in the midst of his army; following him was a horde of ragamuffins running, frolicking, turning head over heels, lowing, bleating, neighing, mewing, barking and devising a thousand other facetious tricks for the greater amusement of the townsfolk who were watching the procession from their doorways. Héraclius, greatly confused, redoubled his pace. A stray dog now ran between the Doctor's legs; a wave of anger swept over him, and he dealt the poor animal, which he would have welcomed formerly, such a vigorous kick, that it fled howling with pain. A frightful din of applause greeted this movement of Héraclius, who losing his head, commenced to run as fast as he was able, still pursued by the infernal escort.

The crowd swept like a whirlwind through the principal street of the town, until it wound up against the house of the Doctor; seeing his door ajar he darted inside slamming it behind him; still running he reached his study where his ape was there to receive him, thrusting out his tongue as a sign of welcome. His ape! it was the living reminder of all his misfortunes, one of the causes of his madness, of all the humiliations

and outrages which he had now endured.

He grasped an oaken stool which lay within reach and at a single blow split open the skull of the wretched quadrumane, who dropped, an inert mass, at the feet of his destroyer; his mind was somewhat relieved by this execution and unbuttoning his frock coat he sank into any easy chair.

Honorine appeared at this moment and nearly fainted with delight on seeing Héraclius; in the exuberance of her joy she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him on both cheeks, forgetting in this manner, the distance which exists in the eyes of the world between the master and the maid, but as regards this, it was surmised that the Doctor had first set her the example.

As yet, the crowd of young rascals outside had not dissolved and was still keeping up so distracting a charivari before his door, that Héraclius in exasperation took refuge in his garden.

There he was confronted with a horrid spectacle.

Honorine, who really loved her master, while lamenting his lunacy, had wanted to prepare an agreeable surprise for him on his return. She had watched in a motherly fashion over the welfare of all the creatures so far collected here; so that owing to the fecundity common to every species of the animal race, the garden now offered a sight similar to that which might have been witnessed when the waters of the Flood subsided, and in Noah's ark were gathered all the living species of animals. In the garden there was a confused aggregation or seething mass of animal life which covered the trees, the shrubberies, the lawn and the very ground itself. The boughs of the trees bent beneath the weight of regiments of birds; while below, the dogs, cats, goats, sheep, fowls, ducks and geese scrambled about in the dust.

The air was filled with a jarring clamor, precisely as on the other side of the house, where the mob of youngsters was holding high revel.

At the sight of this, Héraclius did not contain himself any longer. He snatched up a shovel which had been left standing against the wall, and like the famous warriors whose exploits have been handed down by Homer, at one time springing forward, then backward, striking out right and left with fury in his heart; and foaming at the mouth, he perpetrated a fearful massacre of all his unoffending friends. The scared fowls flew over the walls, the cats ran up the trees, no quarter was given by him. It was an indescribable scene of confusion. At last when the ground was smothered in corpses he dropped from sheer exhaustion, and, like a victorious general, fell asleep on the battlefield.

The next day, the fever having left him, he started out to take a walk about the town; he had no sooner left his door than the street boys, posted at various corners, once more ran after him crying out: "Hou! Hou! Hou! Here's the animal man, the friend of the beasts!" and they recommenced the same clatter as on the previous evening, with endless variations. The Doctor returned precipitately to the house. He was blinded with anger, and finding he was unable to vent it upon humans he vowed an inextinguishable hatred toward the whole animal creation. From that time he had but one desire, one aim, one constant preoccupation, viz.: to

kill animals. He now would watch from morning till evening, spreading nets in his garden to catch the birds, and laying traps along the eaves of the roof to ensnare the cats of the neighborhood. His door, always ajar, would leave visible some appetizing morsel which would appeal to the greediness of passing dogs, and closed sharply when some imprudent victim had succumbed to the temptation. Complaints against the Doctor poured in from all sides; the Commissary of Police called upon him in person on several occasions to warn him to put an end to his merciless warfare. He was loaded down with lawsuits, but nothing availed to check his vengeance.

The indignation of the public now became general. Another riot broke out in the town and if it had not been for the interference of the police he probably would have been strung up by the crowd.

All the medical men of Balançon were summoned to the Prefecture and declared unanimously that Doctor Héraclius Gloss was insane.

For the second time he drove through the town in company of the detectives and heard the heavy portals of the building over which was the inscription "Insane Asylum" close upon him.

CHAPTER XXX

SHOWING THAT THE POPULAR SAYING "THE CRAZIER A MAN IS THE MORE HE LAUGHS" IS NOT ALWAYS EXACTLY TRUE

THE next morning he descended into the yard of the establishment and the first person upon whom his eyes fell was no other than the author of the manuscript on metempsychosis. The two adversaries stepped toward one another, sizing each other up. A ring formed around them; Dagobert Félorme exclaimed:

"There's the man who sought to rob me of my life work, to appropriate to himself the glory of my discovery!"

A murmur arose among the spectators.

"There is the man who claims that the animals are humans and that men are animals," rejoined Héraclius.

Thereupon they commenced an argument; both speaking at once, gradually the discussion grew heated, and, as on the previous occasion, they came to blows; they were finally separated by the onlookers.

Henceforward each of them endeavoured with singular tenacity and perseverance, to attract followers to his side of the dispute, and very soon the entire community was divided into two rival factions, so enthusiastic, so determined, and so irreconcilable that a metempsychosist was unable to meet one of the other persuasion without a subsequent terrible scuffle.

In order to avoid these sanguinary encounters, the Director of the establishment found himself compelled to

assign separate hours of outdoor exercise to each of the contending factions, for never had a more inveterate hatred animated two rival sects since the quarrel of the Guelphs and the Ghibelines. Owing, however, to this wise precaution the chiefs of the two hostile clans, now lived happily enough, heeded and cherished by their disciples, as well as obeyed and revered.

At intervals during the night hours a dog mournfully howling around the walls of the building caused both Héraclius and Dagobert to start up in their beds. It was the faithful Pythagoras that having escaped the vengeance of his master, by some miracle, had tracked him to the threshold of his new dwelling, and was seeking to have the doors of that mansion, where man alone has the right to enter, thrown open to him also.